

ANIMALS
IN THE
QUR'AN

SARRA TLILI



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Animals in the Qur'an

The Islamic tradition has always held animals in high esteem, deserving the same level of consideration as humans. The Qur'an opines that "there is not an animal in the earth nor a flying creature flying on two wings, but they are people like you." This fascinating and highly original book examines the status and nature of animals as they are portrayed in the Qur'an and in adjacent exegetical works, in which animals are viewed as spiritual, moral, intelligent, and accountable beings. In this way, the study presents a challenge to the prevalent view of man's superiority over animals and suggests new ways of interpreting the Qur'an. By placing the discussion within the context of other religions and their treatment of animals, the book also makes a persuasive case for animal rights from an Islamic perspective.

Sarra Tlili is an assistant professor in the Department of Languages, Literatures, and Cultures at the University of Florida.

*To my mother,
To the memory of my father,
To my husband*

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وَمَا أُوتِيْتُمْ مِّنَ الْعِلْمِ إِلَّا قَلِيْلًا

And of knowledge, you have been given but a little!

Qur'an, 17/al-Isrā': 85

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SARRA TLILI

University of Florida



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Preface

This book is an eco-centric reading of the Qur'an, focusing mainly on the animal component of the natural world. I argue that although the Qur'an – being “guidance to humankind” – addresses humans, situates itself within human understandings of the world, and is deeply preoccupied with humans' destiny, the message it communicates is that status depends on spirituality rather than rationality, or for that matter, on any feature that is assumed to belong exclusively to humankind. The Qur'an, I conclude, is a theocentric document: Any being that worships and obeys God obtains God's pleasure and is rewarded in the hereafter. The Qur'an presents these two elements (God's pleasure and afterlife reward or punishment) as the clearest indications of meaningful status. My eco-centric reading is thus situated within a theocentric worldview that has long been perceived in the Islamic scripture.

This book also seeks to challenge the assumption that only humans or the so-called rational beings are capable of engaging in meaningful relationships with God. Islamic tradition generally categorizes creation into two groups: rational beings, consisting of humans, angels, and jinn; and nonrational ones, consisting of all other creatures. Although in this conception God is admittedly not considered part of creation, He, somehow, seems to fit with, or at least to engage with or take interest in, the first more than the second group. It is as if God and the so-called rational beings are the only *active* parties in the scene of existence, whereas the rest of creation simply acts as a setting and decorum. This conception of the world may be inferred from the Qur'an, however, only at the cost of reducing certain enigmatic phenomena described in it to understandable ones, for example, by resorting to figurative interpretations. Opting for

such interpretations, however, is a *human* decision that may be motivated by anthropocentric ideas and feelings.

This conception of the world also seems to impose limitations on God. One of its possible implications is that God differs from the so-called rational beings in degree rather than in essence. God's knowledge, it is true, is understood to be infinite, whereas the so-called rational beings' knowledge remains extremely limited; however, the rational/nonrational division still seems to suggest that both God and rational beings more or less partake in the same type of knowledge, whereas other beings are thought to have none. The Qur'an strongly suggests, however, that the natural world engages with God in ways that are deeply meaningful yet generally inaccessible to humans. A reader who is willing to approach this scripture without certain prevalent assumptions about the human and nonhuman worlds will find a vibrant nature. The cosmos of the Qur'an is highly interactive with its Creator: It makes choices, experiences emotions, takes divine commands, prays, and hymns the praises of God. Naturally, nonhuman beings seem to interact with God in ways that are totally outside the realm of human experience and knowledge, thus, applying to them terminology that is used to describe human experiences is not without problems. The fact that humans do not have the language to describe or the means to perceive other beings' deeper realities, however, does not mean that such realities do not exist. Absence of evidence cannot be taken as evidence of absence. Acknowledging the enigmatic aspect of the natural world, furthermore, is not intellectually humiliating; rather, it is spiritually uplifting, as it may nurture feelings of humility and foster a sense of awe vis-à-vis God's creation.

I have been asked several times how warranted a non-anthropocentric reading of the Qur'an is. Is it truly necessary to place (or re-place) humans within the natural world? Could not the human being continue to remain above nature and still achieve a balanced relationship with the natural world, say, through the notion of stewardship? Needless to say, I am totally persuaded that a non-anthropocentric reading of the Qur'an is not only warranted, but also much needed. This is the case not only because such reading deepens our understanding of the Islamic scripture, but also for its (interconnected) theological and ecological implications.

In fact, assigning status on the sole basis of species membership seems to compete with the two most pivotal principles of the Qur'an: God's oneness and justice. As far as the first notion is concerned, placing humans above the natural world may lead (and has led) to their deification. As an illustration one need only to refer to Rashad Khalifa's translation of

Q. 2:30, in which he renders the Qur'anic word *khalīfa* – which in the last century and a half has become overwhelmingly understood as “God’s vicegerent” – as “a temporary God”! Many modern Muslims would probably find the wording of this translation problematic, however, not the function it implies: the fact that humans act on God’s behalf among His creation. This function does seem to suggest that humans, unlike other creatures, are similar to God in fundamental ways. The phrase temporary God, therefore, is not inconsistent with this representational function, however, it appears to be totally discrepant with the Qur’an’s emphasis on the principles of God’s oneness and transcendence.

This alleged divine favoritism seems also to be incompatible with the Qur’anic notion of God’s justice. Many of course are able to reconcile the two notions of God’s justice and His alleged favoritism – be it at the level of race, gender, or species – by calling upon the principles of divine wisdom and/or freedom. God, it would be claimed, is free to raise someone above another either for reasons that are unknown to humans or for no reason at all. Although hypothetically this can be true, in my understanding this is not how the Qur’an describes God. Therefore, I hope that the distinction I make between the notions of “conferred” and “earned” status (last chapter) would enrich the discussion of the Qur’anic notion of divine justice and its impact on a number of issues, including, but not limited to, ecological matters.

The ecological impact of the exaggeration of humans’ status hardly needs to be elucidated. Many thinkers have, for example, identified the link between humanism, with its emphasis on humans’ centrality in the world, and the current ecological crisis. Similarly, the biblical notion of dominion has often been blamed for nurturing despotic attitudes toward nature. Regardless of whether or not such despotism was intended in the Bible, the notion itself has often been taken as a license for tyranny. In an Islamic context, there seems to be a correlation between the exaggeration of humans’ status, which has peaked in modern Islamic thought, and Muslims’ deteriorating attitudes toward nature in the last century or so. The aim of this book, however, is not to devalue humans; rather, it is to place them amidst a natural order that God seems to value greatly. Such an outlook, in my opinion, is spiritually more fruitful and practically more conducive to a healthy attitude toward nature.

Finally, I need to note that this study is not an exhaustive treatment of Qur’anic animal themes – such treatment proved to be beyond the scope of one book. It is, however, my hope to pursue this and related topics in forthcoming projects. The primary audience of this book would initially

consist of students of Islam and the environment, particularly animal studies. Considering the nature of the questions it raises, however, I hope that it has something to offer to those who are interested in gender studies, ethics, and related fields.

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Working on this book has been intellectually and spiritually transformative, an experience for which I am deeply indebted to all those who helped me in the process. My thanks go first to my advisor, Professor Joseph Lowry for his stimulating ideas, support, encouragement, kindness, and for never failing to be there for me whenever I needed him. It has been a real privilege to have had the opportunity to work under the supervision of someone of his caliber. My sincere thanks also go to the other members of my graduate committee, Professors Everett Rowson, Roger Allen, and Jamal Elias. I am equally thankful to Professor Barbara Von Schlegell for her support and academic advice during my first years at the University of Pennsylvania. Professor Badredine Arfi from the University of Florida meticulously read and commented on my entire manuscript, providing excellent feedback on it, for which I am also very grateful. The University of Florida generously provided me with a grant that allowed me to prepare the final draft of this book.

My dearest friend Dalia Abou-Hagar discussed my topic with me over the phone for countless hours. Her insights and suggestions were most helpful. I want to thank Dalia also for being an exceptionally selfless, devoted, and kind friend. My friends Sa'diyya Shaikh, Ashraf Kagee, Wang Ching Jen, Iman Bashrawi, Mehrziyya Ben Moussa, Bashir Ben Moussa, Kawthar Hamdi, and Sonia Majoul deserve my sincere thanks as well.

My family's unconditional love, prayers, and encouragement have been crucial to my personal and intellectual progress. I want to take this opportunity to express my deep affection to my beloved siblings, Sami, Najwa, Rami, Samir, and Safouene. You are among God's most beautiful gifts to me, and I am thankful! My aunt Zohra's affection is something I

will never be able to repay. I am certainly blessed to have her as a second mother. My beloved husband, Ashraf Oloufa, has borne more than his fair share in our marriage. I thank him warmly for his love and patience, for being proud of my achievements, for believing in me, and for never failing to bring laughter and joy to my heart. May we continue to be *qurrat 'ayn* for one another!

My greatest debt of gratitude is to my mother and my late father. No words can do justice to what my parents have done for me. I pray that their reward be with God for the great people they are and for everything they have done for me.

PART I

CONTEXT

Introduction

Islamic civilization has been markedly attentive to the well-being of animals, acknowledging their interests and extending legal rights and protection to a large number of species, an attitude that is to a large extent the result of the special attention one of the two textual sources of the Islamic religion, the Ḥadīth, pays to them. Although the welfare of animals, human and nonhuman, received ample attention, issues connected with the natures and status of nonhuman species did not benefit from the same level of consideration despite the fact that both the Qur'an and the Ḥadīth contain a wealth of material and offer remarkable perspectives on this dimension of the animal question. Muslims – regardless of how immersed they are in Islamic knowledge, what Islamic disciplines they master, and what form of Islam they embrace – often hold ambivalent views about the psychological natures of nonhuman animals and generally share the idea that the latter are inferior to humans. Muslims perceive this hierarchical scheme both in nature and in the Qur'an and generally believe that it reflects the will of God, who is assumed to favor humans over many or all other creatures. This perception is not, however, supported by a close reading of the Qur'an, which not only presents nonhuman animals as psychologically complex beings, but also values all species far more than is usually conceded. This book sets out to explore the Qur'an's approach to the nature and status of animals, both human and nonhuman.

THE ANIMAL QUESTION

Although questions about the natures, status, and welfare of nonhuman animals have existed since time immemorial, in the last few decades they

have gained an unprecedented momentum, noticeable not only in the establishment of numerous animal-rights movements and the proliferation of philosophical, ethical, and legal literature discussing animals, but also in the types of questions that are asked and the propositions that are made about the rights, natures, and status of many species. The inferior status to which most – if not all – human societies have traditionally consigned other animals is now being contested. Many traditional uses of a large number of animal species are now characterized as abuses and consequently challenged. By analogy with racism and sexism, giving priority to humans' interests over the interests of other animals is sometimes labeled as "speciesism," an attitude which many ethicists consider morally untenable. The very use of the word *animal* to refer to nonhuman animals only is deemed objectionable, not only because it presupposes that humans are intrinsically distinct from other species, but also because it lumps all other species together, as if there are no or hardly any significant differences between them.

There is a clear correlation between this unprecedented interest in other animals' status and welfare and the abuses perpetrated on a number of species, equally unprecedented in their brutality and magnitude. The two fields in which a large number of nonhuman animal species have come to suffer the worst types of cruelty, on a massive scale, are biomedical research and agribusiness. Using animals as tools for scientific research is an old phenomenon, practiced at the time of the Greek doctor Galen and much earlier.¹ What are new about the current situation are the diversification of its methods and the intensity of its practice. In addition to the old phenomenon of vivisection, testing on nonhuman animals now includes electrical shocks, exposure to toxic chemicals, intentional infliction of diseases and psychological trauma, long-term (usually lifetime) confinement, and genetic engineering. The number of nonhuman animals undergoing such experiments in the different governmental, medical, and academic institutions in the United States alone is estimated at tens of millions per year.² Furthermore, many animal-rights advocates believe that most of these experiments can be easily dispensed with because many of them are repetitive, and many others are undertaken for sheer curiosity. Many experiments are also done for reasons deemed trivial, such as research in the field of cosmetics.

¹ R. J. Hankinson, "Le phénomène et l'obscur: Galien et les animaux," in *L'Animal dans l'antiquité*, ed. B. Cassin and J. L. Labarrière (Paris: J. Vrin, 1997), 75–93.

² Paul Waldau, *Animal Rights: What Everyone Needs to Know* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 28–32.

Unlike biomedical research, agribusiness is a relatively new phenomenon, which emerged in England in the late eighteenth century and became widespread in Western societies only after the Second World War.³ The main criticism directed against the method of intensive rearing of certain animal species consists of the confinement system, in which the concerned animals are removed from the relatively natural conditions of traditional farms and exposed to stressful conditions, involving restricted space, lack of natural social interaction with other species members, manipulation of light, unnatural feeding methods, deprivation of preferred food substances, physical exhaustion by keeping the females of certain species in a perpetual state of pregnancy, and frustration of basic needs, such as scratching the ground, and stretching wings in the case of poultry, or grazing in the case of cattle. When certain problems (such as cannibalism) emerge as a result of these stressful conditions, they are usually addressed in even more cruel ways, by resorting, for example, to debeaking of poultry and dehorning of cattle and sheep. At the root of this problem, some argue, lies the corporate mentality in which other animals are considered mere commodities, the appropriate treatment of which is determined by considerations of handling efficiency and cost-effectiveness.

Although scientific inquisitiveness and financial gain are the main motivations for these practices, some thinkers maintain that they find their roots in old cultural and, more importantly, religious attitudes toward other animals. In *Animal Liberation*, Peter Singer states that “Western attitudes to animals have two roots: Judaism and Ancient Greece” which “unite in Christianity.”⁴ While Christianity and, to a lesser extent, Judaism have been portrayed by some as the major culprits, other faith traditions, including Indian ones, which are traditionally famed for their promotion of vegetarianism and other forms of what is considered compassion toward other animals, have not been immune to the charge of speciesism. This charge is usually made on two grounds. On a concrete level, from the standpoint of many animal-rights advocates, major world religions are found blameworthy for condoning, or even endorsing, what is considered cruelty toward other animals because they allow, and sometimes even require, certain animals to be killed for food and for religious sacrifice and to compromise the well-being of other animals in a number

³ Andrew Linzey, Jonathan Webber, and Paul Waldau, “Farming” in *Dictionary of Ethics, Theology and Society*, ed. Paul Barry Clarke and Andrew Linzey (London: Routledge, 1996), 375.

⁴ Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation: A New Ethics For Our Treatment of Animals* (New York: Avon Books 1977), 193.

of other ways.⁵ On a more abstract level, world religions are believed to be guilty of anthropocentrism because they place humans at the pinnacle of the physical world and relegate other animals to an inferior status.

Reactions to these views may be classified into two major categories. Some champions of certain religious traditions have unapologetically endorsed and justified the so-called speciesist religious attitudes, whereas others adopted a rather apologetic attitude. Apologists generally endeavor to emphasize the non-monolithic nature of the religious tradition that they represent. Often, also, they propose certain interpretations of religious texts and practices that reflect more favorable attitudes toward nonhuman animals. Nonetheless, in both types of work the superiority of humans to other animal species usually remains uncontested. For the holders of the unapologetic attitude, this superiority frequently translates into guiltless entitlement to use other animals for human needs, albeit sometimes within certain limits. Apologists, on the other hand, understand humans' superiority to other animals as a form of stewardship in which the former would ideally become the caretakers of the latter and abstain from causing them any harm.

A number of modern ethicists and philosophers have challenged the notion of humans' superiority to other animals. In the first chapter of *Animal Liberation*, titled "All Animals Are Equal," Singer argues that the differences between species, just as the differences between races and sexes, do not form an ethically valid ground for inequality. In the case of humans, he maintains, there is "no compelling reason for assuming that a factual difference in ability between two people justifies any difference in the amount of consideration we give to their needs and interests."⁶ The same principle, in his opinion, should apply to nonhuman animals. The fact that the latter lack the intelligence, complexity, or capabilities which most humans have, does not justify the disregard of their interests. Therefore, without challenging the overall perception of the nature of other animals, Singer establishes the moral principle of "equal consideration," in which the interests of sentient beings, human or nonhuman, should be given the same weight.

Tom Regan, although similarly advocating equality between humans and a number of other animal species (mammals one year of age or older),

⁵ Jordan Paper, "Humans and Animals: The History from a Religio-Ecological Perspective," in *A Communion of Subjects: Animals in Religion, Science, and Ethics*, ed. Paul Waldau and Kimberley Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 325–32.

⁶ Singer, *Animal Liberation*, 5.

bases his argument on the inherent value of the animals in question. The animals whose rights he defends are, in his view, equal to humans not only because their interests, especially those related to the element of sentience, matter, but also because they have enough features comparable to those of humans (such as a certain degree of self-consciousness) to warrant their equality to humans. Therefore, unlike Singer, Regan's egalitarian attitude takes into consideration what he perceives as a certain degree of complexity in the animals whose rights he seeks to defend.

In the religious sphere, opinions regarding humans' superiority to other animals are believed to apply in Islam as well. G. H. Bousquet, discussing the attitudes toward nonhuman animals shared by the three Abrahamic religions, states, "l'homme règne sur les animaux qui sont livrés entre ses mains et qui le craignent... c'est la conception anthropocentrique du monde," thus maintaining not only that Islam is anthropocentric, but also that, like Judaism and Christianity, it gives humans dominion over other animals.⁷ Basheer Masri, who states that "[b]oth science and religion assert that man is the apex of creation," maintains that "Islam, too, declares man as the best of God's creation."⁸ Likewise, Richard Foltz affirms that "Islam is what contemporary animal rights activists would probably call a strongly anthropocentric religion, although Muslims themselves might prefer to see their worldview as 'theocentric.'" Foltz also argues that "[w]ithin the hierarchy of Creation, the Qur'an depicts humans as occupying a special and privileged status,"⁹ and concludes that "it would appear to remain undisputed that the Islamic view of the world is a hierarchical one, in which the human community occupies a higher rank than those of all other animal communities."¹⁰

While Bousquet's, Masri's, and Foltz's statements do reflect the dominant views of Muslims concerning nonhuman animals, there are other plausible interpretations of Islamic, and more particularly, Qur'anic views of other animals. Muslims, of course, like the members of any other faith tradition, hold a wide range of views and attitudes toward animals. Nonetheless, it is generally recognized that authority in this religion lies with two primary textual sources, the Prophetic Tradition (Ḥadīth) and, more importantly, the Qur'an. To my knowledge, however, animal

⁷ G. H. Bousquet, "Des Animaux et de leur traitement selon le Judaïsme, le Christianisme et l'Islam," *Studia Islamica*, 9 (1958): 33.

⁸ Basheer Masri, *Animal Welfare in Islam* (Leicestershire: The Islamic Foundation, 2007), 4.

⁹ Richard Foltz, *Animals in Islamic Tradition and Muslim Cultures* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2006), 15.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 145; see also p. 49.

themes in these two texts have rarely benefited from a close and thorough reading. Moreover, even if one would have been able to regard the full spectrum of views about nonhuman animals in Islamic tradition as representative of what Islam has to say about other animals, these views would probably still be more nuanced than what the earlier quotations seem to suggest. For, even though Muslims (much like non-Muslims) generally consider nonhuman animals to be inferior to humans, this attitude has many shades. In any case, the Qur'an cannot only be read in ways that are consonant with modern views on nonhuman animals, but also a non-anthropocentric reading of this text, in my opinion, seems even more plausible than anthropocentric ones.

Two factors have, however, contributed to obscure non-anthropocentric ideas found in the Qur'an. First, some passages of the text seem to suggest the inferiority of other animals to humans. The Qur'an explicitly permits humans to consume the flesh of many animal species and allows some instrumental uses of certain animals, all of which seem to point to a servile status, and presumably to the inferiority, of these species, and by extrapolation of all nonhuman animals, vis-à-vis humans. The Qur'an also portrays the punishment of a group of humans who violated their covenant with God as consisting of their transformation into apes and pigs, thus seemingly implying their demotion from a higher status, that of humans, to a lower one, that of certain other animal species (*5/al-Mā'ida*). Moreover, certain livestock (*an'ām*) are sometimes presented in the Qur'an as if they lack understanding and consequently as being astray. More generally, the Qur'an repeatedly asserts that all creatures, obviously including nonhuman animals, are *musakhkhar* (subjugated?) to humans, which has been taken as one of the clearest indication of humans' superior status. As I will argue, however, these themes do not necessarily convey inferiority in the way they are usually thought to do. In any case they represent only one among many other dimensions of the Qur'anic portrayal of other animals. When considered together with the rest of the animal themes in the Qur'an, it will – I hope – become clear that nonhuman animals are prized far more than the preceding themes would suggest.

The second factor consists of anthropocentric ideas that have been (and continue to be) projected on to the Qur'an. The fact that interpreters' presumptions about other animals' nature and status have to a certain extent shaped what they emphasize as Qur'anic animal portrayal is surely to be anticipated. After all, the same phenomenon has been discerned in the interpretation of other Qur'anic themes, particularly gender-related

ones. Anthropocentric readings are perhaps to be anticipated even more than other readings. Unlike other possible readings of the Qur'an, those whose interests run counter to anthropocentric attitudes (nonhuman animals) differ from the holders of these attitudes in major ways, including mental and linguistic ones. As a consequence, challenges to anthropocentric attitudes cannot be expected to come from the parties that may have a personal interest in contesting them. This, of course, does not mean that anthropocentric attitudes cannot be possibly questioned. After all, even in the case of patriarchal readings, criticism of prejudiced views is not stimulated only by personal or immediate interests. However, the inability of nonhuman animals to actively influence anthropocentric discourses probably plays some role in the limited awareness of such attitudes.

It is also important to point out that the great interest in humans clearly displayed in the Qur'an in fact seems to foster or at least encourage anthropocentric readings. However, this interest is not necessarily an indication either of a privileged status or of a particular divine preference for humans. The Qur'an may be read as indeed presenting "a decidedly anthropocentric view of God's creativity,"¹¹ as Daniel Madigan observes, however, the reason behind this attitude could simply be that this text, which is addressed primarily or even exclusively to humans, discusses its addressees extensively because its main goal is to convey a message of special relevance to them. In fact, to achieve the desired impact on the target audience, God, who is the main speaker in the Qur'an and who, according to Muslims, is the one who "sent down" this Qur'anic message to the Prophet Muḥammad in order that he relay it to humankind, not only emphasizes what is relevant to humans, but sometimes even seems to espouse their outlook and to consider certain matters from their standpoints. Likewise, the Qur'anic message seems to be mostly situated within the realm of what is known to, or at least imaginable and thinkable by, humans. Attentiveness to the addressees' nature and God's deliberate restriction of materials to those that are known and meaningful to humans have already been discerned at the level of the Meccan or Arabian audience, the latter being the earliest recipients of the Qur'an's message. For example, the seventh/thirteenth century exegete al-Qurṭubī (d. 671/1273) notices that God "speaks [in the Qur'an] about wool, fur, and fleece but not cotton nor linen, because the latter items were not available in the lands of the Arabs." Al-Qurṭubī concludes that

¹¹ Daniel A. Madigan, "Themes and Topics," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur'an*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 81.

“God spoke to them [people of Arabia] about the items they knew well in a way that made sense to them.”¹² Another example with which this exegete illustrates the same point is that in the Qur’an hail is mentioned but not snow (24/al-Nūr: 43). He comments: “[God] spoke to them about hail because they knew it well, while He kept silent about snow because they were not familiar with it.”¹³ In an animal-related context, al-Qurṭubī resolves a difficulty presented by a Qur’anic passage in the same way. In this passage, it is stated that “There is not an animal in the earth, or a flying creature flying on two wings, but they are peoples like you” (6/al-An‘ām: 38).¹⁴ Among the questions raised in the discussion of this verse is: Why are a large number of animals omitted from this comparison, notable among them sea animals? In his attempt to account for this difficulty, another exegete, Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210) tries to fit sea animals in one of the two categories mentioned in the verse. He says, “It is reasonable to describe sea animals as creeping creatures, since they creep in water, or to consider their movement as a type of flying; since they swim in water the way flying creatures ‘swim’ in the open air.”¹⁵ In contrast with this apologetic attitude, al-Qurṭubī simply accounts for the mention of “earthly” animals to the exclusion of heavenly ones by saying that “these are the animals [humans] know and witness.”¹⁶ In fact, if the Qur’an were to give an exhaustive list of all creatures that it considers animals, this list would have also included spiritual beings, such as angels and jinn,¹⁷ and possibly many other species about which humans know nothing. This, however, does not seem to be the Qur’anic intention, and therefore, the list of animals mentioned is limited to what is in the immediate visual field of humans. Therefore, in al-Qurṭubī’s opinion, certain aspects of the Qur’an’s statements are formulated in accordance with the scope of knowledge and experience of its audience, which points to the importance of the audience as a factor in this respect. It needs to be pointed out, however, that in spite of the clear emphasis on humans,

¹² Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi‘ li-ahkām al-Qur’an*, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 2000), 10: 101.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Unless otherwise stated, all translations of the Qur’an are from Mohammed Marmaduke Pickthall’s *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran*, with some modifications. All other translations are mine unless stated otherwise.

¹⁵ Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *al-Taḥf al-kabīr* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 2000), 12: 175.

¹⁶ Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi‘*, 6: 270.

¹⁷ According to Islamic tradition Jinn are spiritual beings endowed with freewill.

the Qur'an still contains ample references to other beings, ranging from angels to inanimate things, occasionally going so far as to espouse their views and to present their perspectives as well.

It may still be argued that the fact that humans have been chosen as God's addressees can in itself be regarded as a sign of special favor. Although this may be a valid point, the equation of this favor with superiority is an unsustainable leap, especially when the Qur'an itself resists precisely this conclusion and repeatedly emphasizes that God's favors in this life are not necessarily indicative of His preference to their recipients. In fact, although the Qur'an never fails to recommend to humans what it considers right and to try to dissuade them from what it considers wrong, whenever it describes their actual state it makes it clear that, more often than not, they grievously fail to comply with divine injunctions and recommendations. However, the sheer emphasis on human beings likely contributed at least in part to feelings of self-importance among this text's human audience.

In this book, I wish to examine the status and nature of animals, human and nonhuman, mainly as portrayed in the Qur'an and to point to new possible ways of reading the Qur'an's animal themes. My main premise is that, although a non-speciesist reading of the Qur'an is surprisingly well-founded, the Muslim tradition has not always read it in this way. Therefore, this study will endeavor primarily to offer an alternative reading of Qur'anic animal themes, but at the same time to assess the extent to which this scripture has shaped Muslims' views of and attitudes toward nonhuman animals. To this end, I propose to undertake a contextual reading of the Qur'an, wherein the study of its animal themes is undertaken in conjunction with the study of interpretations offered in selected works from the Islamic exegetical tradition (*tafsir*). This approach will at once provide valuable insights into the Qur'an's animal themes and familiarize readers with some of the different ways they were received by commentators.

To place this discussion within larger contexts, the first chapter of the book surveys a number of views about other animals held by some major world faith traditions and philosophical trends. This will introduce various pertinent questions that have been raised in this context. The second chapter introduces the discipline of Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsir*), some important notions that are relevant to the discussion of the book, and the four exegetes who will be examined in this book, namely, ibn Jarir al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210), Abū 'Abd

Allāh al-Qurṭubī (d. 671/1273), and Ismāʿīl ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373). The third chapter discusses the Qurʾanic themes traditionally thought to convey other animals' inferiority to humans. The fourth and the fifth chapters respectively present a discussion of the portrayal of nonhuman animals and human beings in the Qurʾan.

I

Animals Outside Islamic Tradition

ANIMALS IN LATE ANTIQUITY

Traditional justifications for nonhuman animals’ assumed inferiority

There are two fundamental and interconnected aspects to the animal issue; the first is of a more abstract nature and concerns animals’ status, whereas the second is of a practical character and concerns the way animals should be treated. Considered together, the two aspects lead to two basic questions: (1) On what grounds are nonhuman animals assigned a given status? (2) What determines human responsibility toward them (or lack thereof)?

Historically, the perceived nature of other animals was not the only factor that shaped the answers to these questions. The conception of the world and the place of the human race in it was perhaps a more important factor. Major world religions and philosophical schools emphasize the principle of humans’ dignity, which, obviously enough, translates into the assignment of a lower status to many other beings, in particular those with which humans share the physical world. In the West, the concept of humans’ supremacy has only been contested in the last few centuries, mainly as a result of the advent of the theory of evolution – even then, perhaps not very profoundly. Darwin himself, the father of the theory of evolution who is thought to have “demolished the intellectual foundations of those attitudes,” is accused of having “retained the moral attitudes to animals of earlier generations,” whereas his “followers went out of their

way to emphasize that although man was a part of nature and descended from animals, this did not mean that his status had been altered.”¹

The lower status of nonhuman animals is given both “religious” and “rational” justifications. On the religious level, a number of theistic faiths foster the belief that divine will shows partiality toward humans at the expense of other animals, whereas on the rational one, other animals are deemed to be inherently inferior to the human species mainly because of their perceived nature as dumb creatures – in the sense of lacking both intelligence and the faculty of speech. Obviously, such an attitude not only has philosophical or spiritual consequences, but may also involve important practical ones. As pointed out, Singer blames the atrocious conditions in which a large number of animal species live today on such deeply rooted denigrating views of other animals in Western traditions. Because many human societies have denied nonhuman animals any intrinsic value, the latter’s only worth has often been limited to their utility value as servants to human beings. In some extreme, if not uncommon, cases, it was believed that there was no way one could wrong the “lower species,” simply because the whole point of their existence was that they “serve us.”

Animals in Judaism

In the view of a number of scholars, the Jewish tradition’s attitude toward nonhuman species has two major sides to it: It considers them inferior to humans, while at the same time it displays concern for their well-being.² The inferior status to which other animals are consigned is believed to stem mainly from a number of biblical themes that highlight the special status of humankind. This is further corroborated by the perceived nature of other animals, which, it is argued as well, finds substantiation in the Bible. Although some voices within the Jewish tradition have sought to interpret these biblical themes in ways that are consonant with certain modern sensitivities, they still fell short of conferring on them a status equal to that of humans. The second dimension perceived in the Jewish attitude toward other animals, the concern for their well-being, has also been open to different interpretations. Whereas in some approaches this dimension is used to illustrate the relatively important status of other

¹ Singer, *Animal Liberation*, 219–20.

² See for example Roberta Kalechofsky, “Hierarchy, Kinship, and Responsibility: The Jewish Relationship to the Animal World,” in *A Communion of Subjects* (see note 5 in the Introduction), 92.

animals in Judaism in a concrete manner, other approaches claim that this attention is paid to them only in their capacity as property of human beings, not for their own sake.

Other animals' status

A number of scholars perceive a correlation between the inferior status to which the Hebrew Bible supposedly relegates other animals and this scripture's intention to demythologize the animal world.³ In contrast with preceding and early contemporaneous civilizations that had animal deities, such as the Babylonian and the Egyptian cultures, the Jewish religion, Elijah Schochet maintains, "conceived of God as being absolutely transcendent – over, above, and beyond nature."⁴ Out of mistrust of totemism, Schochet further contends, the Bible had to strip animals of any mysterious features that could lead to an exaggeration of their status. However, the Bible, at least according to one interpretation, did not only keep God outside the realm of nature, but man as well.⁵ In fact, as will be pointed out, some voices in the Jewish tradition consider that in many ways humans are to other animals what God is to humans, especially to the Israelites.

The most important biblical themes that are thought to constitute the foundation for humans' superiority to other animals are those of dominion, the order of creation, the creation of Adam in God's image, and the act of naming nonhuman animals with which, according to the biblical account, Adam was entrusted. On a more concrete level, the permissibility to eat the flesh of a number of animal species, the sacrifice rituals, and the biblically sanctioned utility aspect of some animals are often taken as indications of the inferiority not only of the animal species in question, but of all nonhuman animals.

The biblical theme of dominion is considered the clearest indication of humans' superiority to other animals. According to Schochet, "[m]an's inherent superiority over fauna is manifest in his right of 'dominion' over them," a right that, in his view, "[s]cripture clearly proclaims,"⁶

³ Elijah Judah Schochet, *Animal Life in Jewish Tradition: Attitudes and Relationships* (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1984), 22; Paul Waldau, *The Specter of Speciesism: Buddhist and Christian Views of Animals* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 63.

⁴ Schochet, *Animal life in Jewish Tradition*, 24.

⁵ Henri Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 1948), 343–4.

⁶ Schochet, *Animal Life in Jewish Tradition*, 11.

as it grants humans the right to rule “over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth” (Genesis 1: 26).⁷

Although Schochet unapologetically and forthrightly considers the idea of dominion a clear indication of humans’ higher status, other scholars, although not departing radically from this view, still try to minimize the significance of humans’ superiority. A number of voices in the Jewish tradition agree about the biblical hierarchical scheme without assigning the same weight to this hierarchy.⁸ Some voices also admit that dominion, “however benignly interpreted, is an omnipresent temptation to power”; however, this admission is used to caution that unless this prerogative is used in the way it is intended, it will result in the human beings’ descent “to the lowest depths.”⁹

The chronological order of creation is another theme sometimes interpreted to imply human’s superiority to other species. Because in one of the biblical chronologies the creation of Adam concludes the divine creative process, it is considered the pinnacle of creation, and Adam and Eve are considered the “*telos* of the primordial birthing, its supreme triumph, its flower;” whereas “animals are auxiliary players at best”¹⁰ and mere subordinates to Adam.¹¹ In contrast with this interpretation, however, Kalechofsky notes that elsewhere in the Jewish tradition, particularly in the Aggadic tales, humans are reminded of the fact that mosquitoes are created before them in an attempt to deflect their (humans’) arrogance. Therefore, the same order of creation is used for the opposite purpose, that is, tempering humans’ feelings of superiority.

Moreover, the Bible has two different chronologies: one of which other animals are created before Adam, and in the other, they are created after him, yet before Eve, in an attempt to provide Adam with helpers (Genesis 2: 18–20). Although the second account also emphasizes the importance of Adam, for whose sake other animals are created, it still presents them

⁷ Michael D. Coogan, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible: New Revised Standard Version*, ed. Michael D. Coogan (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2007, 3rd edition).

⁸ See for example, Yoël Arbeitman, “In All Adam’s Domain,” in *Judaism and Animal Rights: Classical and Contemporary Responses*, ed. Roberta Kalechofsky (Marblehead: Micah Publications, Inc., 1992), 41.

⁹ Kalechofsky, “Hierarchy, Kinship, and Responsibility,” 95 (citing Rabbi Hanina).

¹⁰ Kimberley C. Patton, “He Who Sits In the Heavens Laughs: Recovering Animal Theology in the Abrahamic Traditions,” *The Harvard Theological Review*, 93, 4 (Oct. 2000): 406.

¹¹ Ronald H. Isaacs, *Animals in Jewish Thought and Tradition* (Jerusalem, New Jersey, Northvale: Jason Aronson Inc., 2000), 55.

as potential companions to the first man instead of his subjects.¹² In the end, nonhuman animals fail to fill this role, which could be filled only by Eve. Nevertheless, the second account still seems to have a more favorable impact on nonhuman animals' status in the Bible.

What is still remarkable about this theme, however, is how the conclusion of human's superiority to other animals is drawn from two conflicting chronologies. In both scenarios, the first man is portrayed as God's main preoccupation, whereas other animals – whether created before Adam as part of the preparations for his arrival into the scene of creation or added later to address his loneliness – are there only for his service and accommodation. Regardless of the extent to which the hierarchical scheme is scriptural, the fact that the same conclusion is reached from two conflicting chronologies is rather suggestive of the anthropocentric attitude with which the Bible is approached.

According to Schochet, the creation of Adam in God's image also denotes "a special quality, unique to humankind, and missing in any other lower creatures." This quality, he argues, "bespeaks God's special interest in, and concern for, man, as well as man's capacity for entering into a special relationship with his Creator." Nonetheless, Schochet admits that "[t]he precise meaning of this phrase may be subject to differences of opinion," and points out that "man's superiority is 'in image' but not 'in substance,' for man, too, emanates from the earth and returns to the earth."¹³ In fact, in the Jewish tradition, as in the Islamic one, this literally earthly origin, which is shared with other animals, is so central to human identity that it is reflected in the first man's name, who, according to one etymological explanation, was named "after the earth (*adama*) from which he was taken."¹⁴ This theme of common origin, however, is not consistently given the same weight. Although the two creation stories of the Hebrew Bible – which, according to biblical scholars, reflect two different underlying sources and therefore two different theological perspectives – stress the "distinction of man," the older (Yahwist) story of creation (Genesis 2: 4b–25), Baker notices, still states that "both man and the animals are formed out of the dust of the ground."¹⁵ In contrast,

¹² Patton, "He Who Sits," 405.

¹³ Schochet, *Animal Life in Jewish Tradition*, 10.

¹⁴ Leigh N. B. Chipman, "Mythic Aspects of the Process of Adam's Creation in Judaism and Islam," *Studia Islamica*, 93 (2001): 16. See also *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 13 Hebrew Bible (henceforth HB), comment on Genesis 2: 7.

¹⁵ John Austin Baker, "Biblical Attitudes to Nature," in *Man and Nature*, ed. Hugh Montefiore (London: Collins, 1975), 88.

in the later (Priestly) account of creation (Genesis 1), “the theme of common physical origin for men and animals is suppressed altogether.” Baker even points to the possibility that “the writer of Genesis 1 has deliberately snubbed [the theme of man’s earthly origin]; and this,” Baker adds, “would strengthen our impression that he is intentionally minimizing those features common to man and the animals.”¹⁶

Schochet also considers the act of naming *animals* with which Adam was entrusted as not only another indication of humans’ superiority to other animals, but also something that imparts a divine quality to the first man and his progeny. “God,” Schochet states, “as the Lord of the universe, bestows names upon the structures of the universe and the dimensions of time, while man, designated by God to be the lord of the animals, is here granted similar power to bestow names upon his own animal subjects.”¹⁷ Similarly, Baker considers that because of this act, Adam not only proved to be “nearer to God” than other animals, but also that he shared some “of the insight that enabled God to create them in the first place.” As a consequence, man’s natural role “is one of sovereignty over other creatures – not the absolute sovereignty that belongs to God alone, but at least a relative authority and superiority.”¹⁸ This God-like quality in humans is even detected in the ritual of sacrifice of animals in which “[t]he offerer and priest play the part of God, and the domesticated animals – from the herd and the flock – play the part of the people (and particularly Israel),” for “[a]s God is to people, so too – during the process of sacrifice – is the people of Israel to the domesticated animals offered for sacrifice.”¹⁹ John Passmore also notes that “in primitive thought to have possession of a thing’s name is to have power over it.”²⁰ Whereas to these authors the act of naming other animals suggests lordship and dominance, to others, it suggests the establishment of a bond rather than dominance. “That with which we bond,” Kalechofsky comments, “we call by name.”²¹

In addition to the themes that lift the human species above other ones, some scholars of Judaism portray nonhuman animals as intellectually

¹⁶ Ibid., 91–2.

¹⁷ Schochet, *Animal Life in Jewish Tradition*, 11. See also John Passmore, *Man’s Responsibility for Nature* (London: Duckworth, 1974), 8.

¹⁸ Baker, “Biblical Attitudes to Nature,” 90.

¹⁹ Jonathan Klawans, “Sacrifice in Ancient Israel: Pure Bodies, Domesticated Animals, and the Divine Shepherd,” in *A Communion of Subjects* (see note 5 in Introduction), 73.

²⁰ John Passmore, *Man’s Responsibility for Nature* (London: Duckworth, 1974), 8.

²¹ Kalechofsky, “Hierarchy, Kinship, and Responsibility,” 94.

deficient, a characteristic that, to them, illustrates other animals' inherent inferiority. Schochet asserts that in the Hebrew scripture, "[b]easts are by their very nature deemed stupid and inferior to man in understanding," which to him is another indication of "man's superiority over animals."²² In Ronald Isaacs's opinion, nonhuman animals' inferior intellect affects their status in that it prevents them from studying the Torah, thus apparently resulting in their spiritual inferiority as well. Another trait taken as an indication of nonhuman animals' inferiority is their incapability to produce intelligible language, which contrasts with humans' ability to communicate clearly through speech.²³

Other animals' welfare

However, even if nonhuman animals are generally deemed in Judaism to be inferior to humans, this tradition still manifests an attitude of compassion toward them (other animals), as clearly shown in Judaism's unmistakable concern for their welfare. This concern is best represented in the important biblically derived injunction stipulating that no sorrow is to be inflicted on a living creature;²⁴ an injunction that not only restricts the human prerogatives in dealing with other animals, but also enjoins the former to be kind to the latter. Although Judaism, like the other two Abrahamic and many other faiths, allows its adherents to slaughter members of certain animal species for food, it still imposes a number of limitations on the ways humans are to benefit from this privilege. *Sheḥitah*, the Jewish ritual slaughter, is believed to eliminate or at least minimize pain.²⁵ The Bible commands the Israelites to look after domestic animals that have been lost (Deut. 22: 1–3). It prohibits them from harnessing together an ox and an ass (Deut. 22: 10), which is understood to be a measure of protection for the weaker animal in general.²⁶ If one finds a bird's nest, only the eggs or the baby birds are to be taken, whereas the mother is to be spared (Deut. 22: 6–7), which is also taken as a measure of mercy toward the mother bird, as it will allow it to "produce more offspring."²⁷ Likewise, it is prohibited to "seethe a kid in its mother's milk"

²² Schochet, *Animal Life in Jewish Tradition*, 11.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., 198, 219.

²⁵ Temple Grandin, "Humanitarian Aspects of *Sheḥitah* in the United States," *Judaism*, 39 (Fall 1990): 436.

²⁶ Cohn-Sherbok, "Hope for the Animal Kingdom," in *A Communion of Subjects*, 82.

²⁷ Ibid.

(Exodus 23: 19) and to kill a mother cow or ewe with their young ones on the same day.²⁸

This concern for the welfare of other animals, however, is not unanimously considered an end in itself. These Biblical injunctions, Schochet insists, are ultimately meant to serve the human being rather than the “beast.” He finds corroboration for his opinion in the fact that the biblical “legislation is strictly limited to domestic animals,” which, for him, points to “a utilitarian factor that must not be overlooked.”²⁹ Therefore, when man is commanded to return a lost animal to its owner, even when the owner is an enemy, the point is “the restoration of lost *property* to its rightful owner” (emphasis in the original). Likewise, “the dominant factor” in the assistance in the loading and unloading of beasts of burden is “the preservation of another’s property.”³⁰ The mother bird should be set free before its eggs or little ones are taken to avoid “any possibility, however minute, of causing the extermination of an entire species of bird at one time,”³¹ and the prohibition of boiling the kid in the mother’s milk is because this is considered a pagan practice from which the Israelites needed to dissociate themselves.³² However, commenting on the biblical saying that “A righteous man has regard for the life of his beast” (Proverbs, 12: 10), Baker states that “the quality that makes a man considerate of his working animals is not prudence or good business sense but ‘righteousness’, being fair,”³³ hence, de-emphasizing the utilitarian factor and highlighting the moral obligation toward other animals instead.

Other animals in rabbinic literature

In contrast with the Bible, Schochet characterizes the rabbinic attitude toward other animals as “one of limited and cautious *remythologization*.” As a result of this attitude, “the emerging image of the animal [in rabbinical thought] is far more colorful and mysterious [than their image in the Bible].”³⁴ In this body of literature, one comes across not only “mythical creatures embodying fantastic and grotesque qualities,”³⁵ but

²⁸ Ibid., 83.

²⁹ Schochet, *Animal Life in Jewish Tradition*, 63.

³⁰ Ibid., 64.

³¹ Ibid., 71.

³² Ibid., 70.

³³ Baker, “Biblical Attitudes to Nature,” 98.

³⁴ Schochet, *Animal Life in Jewish Tradition*, 89.

³⁵ Ibid., 90.

also a number of themes that seem to elevate the status of other animals. For example, ants are admired for their wisdom, and humans are admonished to observe and learn from them (Proverbs 6: 6).³⁶ Likewise, certain species are occasionally portrayed as moral beings whose qualities humans are encouraged to emulate. For instance, “modesty could have been learned from the cat ... honesty from the ant ... chastity from the dove ... and good manners from the cock.”³⁷ Schochet also notes that, in “suggesting that humans would do well to learn certain vital moral lessons and basic religious truths by observing the behavior of animals, the rabbis occasionally went so far as to endow animals with ‘religious’ sentiments and a fervent desire to serve their Creator.” As a consequence, it is not “unusual to find animals playing a pivotal role in the unfolding of divinely ordained events, and God will frequently call upon fauna to function as His emissaries in dispensing divine justice upon mankind.”³⁸ Schochet, however, downplays the theme of other animals’ “religiosity” and expresses his doubt that “the beasts involved [in divine assignments] had a true awareness of their mission.”³⁹

Nonetheless, rabbinical literature not only endows other animals with characteristics that are traditionally thought to be the monopoly of human beings, such as the moral features and the religious feelings pointed out earlier, but sometimes gives such weight to their interests that they are prioritized over the interests of humans. God’s compassion for other animals in this body of literature is perhaps best illustrated in a Talmudic story about Rabbi Judah Ha-Nasi,⁴⁰ in which it is related that he was insensitive to a calf’s cry for help when it was taken to the slaughter. As a result, Rabbi Ha-Nasi was inflicted with severe illness from which he was miraculously cured only when he saved the lives of some weasels.⁴¹ Clearly, then, according to this story, a nonhuman animal’s feelings (the calf’s) are not only acknowledged, but are given so much weight that for its sake a person who is so revered in the Jewish tradition is severely punished. It is also significant that the punishment is lifted only when the same person shows compassion to other nonhuman animals.

³⁶ Ibid., 126.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Schochet, *Animal Life in Jewish Tradition*, 129.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Judah Ha-Nasi, (latter half of the second and beginning of the third century CE) patriarch of Judea and redactor of the *Mishnah*.

⁴¹ Babylonian Talmud: Tractate Baba Nezi’a 85a.

Therefore, even if other animals in the Hebrew tradition are considered inferior to humans, this does not mean that they have no value at all. Kimberley Patton, commenting on the status of other animals in the three Abrahamic traditions, but which in fact seems to apply mostly to Judaism, states that “it is not that animals are not infinitely precious to God or that they are not a source of great interest to Him. It is that human beings are, agonizingly, of infinitely more value and interest.”⁴² Such attitudes vis-à-vis other animals may still be unsatisfactory to some modern sensitivities, and it can still be argued – as Singer seems to suggest – that had animals in Judaism been prized more and had their status been higher, the deterioration of their treatment in the last decades could have been prevented. It is still doubtful, however, that these attitudes are purely the outcome of scriptural teachings about other animals, let alone of Judaism. Although one may agree with Singer that the idea of dominion, the fact of blaming the Fall of man on a woman and an animal, and the fact that after the Fall Adam and Eve are clothed in animal skin are not animal-friendly themes, it may still be argued that it is through human-centric interpretations that such themes have acquired a disproportionate impact on the status of other animals.⁴³ Human-centric interpretations have had a major impact on the understanding of scriptural animal themes in the two other Abrahamic traditions as well.

Animals in Christianity

Andrew Linzey, one of the major contemporary voices on nonhuman animals in Christianity, complains that

The idea that the specifically animal creation should be the subject of honour and respect because it is created by God, however elementary that idea may now appear to us, is not one that has been given endorsement throughout centuries of Christian thought. Whilst it can be claimed to have some grounding in scripture in, for example, the psalmist’s sense of wonder and beauty at God’s creation and in the regard that Jesus claimed even for sparrows, these intimations have never been developed into systematic theological thought, still less full-blown doctrine.⁴⁴

What has been a greater failure than the notion of reverence, Linzey further asserts, is the concept of responsibility toward other animals,

⁴² Patton, “He Who Sits In the Heavens Laughs,” 407. It is questionable, however, that this comment applies uniformly to the three traditions.

⁴³ Singer, *Animal Liberation*, 194.

⁴⁴ Andrew Linzey, *Animal Theology* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 3.

which, in his view, is even more absent from the Christian tradition.⁴⁵ Jay McDaniel, another Christian scholar, also affirms that Christianity, which has been “‘good news’ for humanity,” has “often been bad news for animals,” and wonders whether it “can become good news for them in the future.”⁴⁶

Christian attitudes toward other animals, some scholars maintain, have their roots in both Hebrew and Hellenistic sources. However, from these two traditions Christianity seems to have inherited mostly unfavorable attitudes toward other animals. Jewish scholars, as pointed out, although consistently highlighting the higher status of humans, do nonetheless stress the common origin of humans with other animals and pay attention to the latter’s well-being. Christianity inherited the Jewish view of humans’ superiority to other animals – a view that, Paul Waldau maintains, gradually became even more deeply entrenched in the former – while ignoring “the [Hebrew] texts which required it to care for other animals.”⁴⁷ The Old Testament, Passmore maintains, “unlike many Christian theologians, does not set up an unbridgeable gap between man and his fellow-creatures ... and is uncompromisingly theocentric,” whereas Christianity, “with its God who took human shape, is, or tends to be, anthropocentric, at least so far as the things of this world are concerned.”⁴⁸ Likewise, Hellenistic cultures encompassed a variety of attitudes toward and views of other animals, some of which were rather favorable. However, it is usually maintained that such elements did not find a fertile soil in Christianity either.

Although Bousquet notes that the Christian Bible does not have much to say about other animals,⁴⁹ the paucity of animal themes in this text is not necessarily a sign of indifference “[s]ince many of the issues, concerns, and concepts relating to other animals were taken as having already been fully stated and resolved in the inherited texts.”⁵⁰ What might perhaps be more objectionable from an animal advocate’s point of view is that, despite the meagerness of animal themes in the Christian

⁴⁵ Ibid., 12.

⁴⁶ Jay McDaniel, “Practicing the Presence of God: A Christian Approach to Animals,” in *A Communion of Subjects* (see note 5 in Introduction), 132.

⁴⁷ Waldau, *The Specter of Speciesism*, 213.

⁴⁸ Passmore, *Man’s Responsibility for Nature*, 12.

⁴⁹ Bousquet, who is surprised at how little interest the Christian tradition accords to the “animal questions,” proposes as an explanation to this indifference the fact that “le Nouveau Testament passe la question presque totalement sous silence.” G. H. Bousquet, “Des Animaux et de leur traitement,” 36.

⁵⁰ Waldau, *The Specter of Speciesism*, 173.

Bible, a number of unfavorable views of other animals are found in its symbolic and parabolic use of nonhuman animal images. For example, Waldau notices how false prophets in 2 Peter 2: 12 are compared to “natural brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed.”⁵¹ Likewise, he points to the criticism of Cretans in Titus 1: 12, who are compared to “evil beasts.” Paul’s comment on the biblical injunction “You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain” (Deut. 25: 4), in which he suggests that the subject of this passage is the human being rather than the ox,⁵² has also been taken as a clear sign of the decline in feelings of concern and reverence for other animals in Christianity.⁵³ Although Paul’s interpretation does not necessarily suggest that he is “anti-oxen,” a later Christian reading of it does explicitly reflect unfavorable attitudes toward nonhuman animals.⁵⁴

This later Christian reading is indeed believed to bear much of the responsibility for the direction this tradition took with respect to other animals. Waldau notes how “the leading figures of the early Christian tradition” de-emphasized “certain features of the Yahwist account that reflect more integration with the land.”⁵⁵ Christian interpretation, Waldau further argues, had a negative effect on the Bible’s conception of the nonhuman animal world through extrapolations and “logical” leaps. This can be seen for example in Augustine’s treatment of the biblical account in which Jesus is reported to have exorcised some humans by sending the devils that were haunting them into a herd of swine (Matthew 8: 28–33; Mark 5: 1–21; Luke 8: 26–40). Commenting on this incident, Augustine says, “Christ himself shows that to refrain from the killing of animals ... is the height of superstition for, judging that there are no common rights between us and the beasts ..., he sent the devils into a herd of swine,” hence assuming that “a few individuals of one type of nonhuman ... represent *all* other nonhuman animals.”⁵⁶

Augustine, whose views of nonhuman animals in Waldau’s words are “of a negative and exclusivist nature,” had a negative impact in

⁵¹ Ibid., 175.

⁵² Paul asks, “Is it for oxen that God is concerned? Does he not speak entirely for our sake?” (1 Corinthians 9: 9–10).

⁵³ For example, Singer, *Animal Liberation*, 199; Richard Sorabji, *Animal Minds and Human Morals: The Origins of the Western Debate* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), 195.

⁵⁴ Waldau, *The Specter of Speciesism*, 213.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 214.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 89.

reinforcing exclusivist reasoning and views of other animals in the Christian tradition.⁵⁷ Richard Sorabji also asserts that “the Stoic view of animals, with its stress on their irrationality, became embedded in Western, Latin-speaking Christianity above all through Augustine.”⁵⁸ However, among postbiblical theologians, Augustine is neither the most extreme in his views of other animals nor is his impact on Christianity in this respect the most prevalent. A more influential figure in this respect, Linzey maintains, was Aquinas. This “giant of the Catholic tradition,” who himself was strongly influenced by Hellenistic thought – in particular the Aristotelian hierarchical conception of nature – saw no objection to the use of the imperfect (i.e., respectively inanimate beings, plants, and other animals) for the perfect (i.e., the human being) and even found scriptural corroboration for this attitude in the idea of dominion. For him, Linzey quotes, “the Divine Ordinance of animals and plants is preserved not for themselves but for man’ and hence ‘as Augustine says ... both their life and their death are subject to our use.’” Aquinas also considered other animals, just as plants, to be “devoid of reason whereby to set themselves in motion”; and maintained that “they are moved, as it were by another, by a kind of natural impulse, a sign of which is that they are naturally enslaved and accommodated to the uses of others.”⁵⁹

Although Augustine and Aquinas might have been the most influential as a result of their great impact on Christianity in general, they are certainly not unique in holding what are deemed to be derogatory views of other animals.⁶⁰ This, of course, does not mean that the Christian tradition is void of thinkers who see other animals in a more favorable light. Among these, St. Francis of Assisi is perhaps the most prominent. This “greatest revolutionary in Western history,” as Lynn White calls him, “tried to substitute the idea of equality of all creatures, including man, for the idea of man’s limitless rule of creation.” According to White, however, St. Francis failed!⁶¹ The general consensus is clearly that “[f]or many centuries in the Christian tradition, exclusivism favoring humans on the basis of species membership considerations was held to be wisdom and the highest form of morality.”⁶²

⁵⁷ Ibid., 191.

⁵⁸ Richard Sorabji, *Animal Minds and Human Morals*, 2.

⁵⁹ Linzey, *Animal Theology*, 13.

⁶⁰ For a survey of the views of and attitudes toward other animals of a number of early Christian theologians, see Waldau, *The Specter of Speciesism*, 179–201.

⁶¹ Lynn White, “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis,” *Science*, 155 (1967), 1207.

⁶² Waldau, *The Specter of Speciesism*, 216.

Animals in Buddhism

Religions originating in the Indian subcontinent offer perspectives on animals that diverge significantly from the ones found in the Abrahamic traditions. Such perspectives, moreover, are often interpreted as having a positive impact on other animals' status and treatment.⁶³ In the opinion of a number of scholars, reincarnation, one of the main doctrines in these religions, implies continuity and kinship between all animated beings because it allows for cross-species rebirth. This thus seemingly suggests that no wide gap separates the world of humans from that of other animal species. The centrality of the nonviolence precept (the Sanskrit notion of *ahimsā*) in these traditions suggests that the compassionate treatment of animals is of utmost importance to the adherents to Indian faiths. In spite of this, deeper analyses have shown that these traditions, like the Abrahamic ones, are deeply anthropocentric.

One of the salient features of the Buddhist attitude toward other animals is the keen interest it takes in them, noticeable for example in the great number of references to them in this tradition's various religious texts.⁶⁴ The "overwhelmingly agrarian condition of the Indian society in the early Buddhist period"⁶⁵ can, of course, account for this interest, however, this does not detract from the attention that this tradition paid to other animals. Moreover, in many of these texts, particularly in the *Jātaka* tales, which relate episodes from the Buddha's previous lives, non-human animals, it is often maintained, are presented in a positive light.⁶⁶

Buddhism, like Hinduism and Jainism, also lays great emphasis on the necessity of abstaining from intentional infliction of injury on animals (human and nonhuman). This precept applies in an even stronger manner to Buddhist monks, whom the Buddha is reported to have prohibited from intentionally destroying the life of any living being.⁶⁷ Although it can be argued that the strict prohibition of monks from killing any animal and the consideration of killing as bad *karma* seek to emphasize

⁶³ Paul Waldau, "Buddhism and Animal Rights" in *Contemporary Buddhist Ethics*, ed. Damien Keown (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2000), 86.

⁶⁴ Waldau, "Buddhism and Animal Rights," 83.

⁶⁵ Ian Harris, "A Vast Unsupervised Recycling Plant: Animals and the Buddhist Cosmos," in *A Communion of Subjects* (see note 5 in Introduction), 207.

⁶⁶ Francis Story, *The Place of Animals in Buddhism* (Ceylon: Buddhist Publication Society, 1964), 10–11.

⁶⁷ Christopher K. Chapple, *Nonviolence to Animals, Earth, and Self in Asian Traditions* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1993), 22.

the moral excellence of humans, particularly monks, the impact of these precepts on nonhuman animals is still significant.

Buddhism also sees the world of humans and that of other animals as a continuum because humans can be reborn as other animals and vice versa.⁶⁸ Likewise, the laws of karma apply equally to all species, the human one included. Consequently, at least at a theoretical level, other animals are not banned from the opportunity of progress on the wheel of rebirth (*samsāra*) because a meritorious act performed by a nonhuman animal causes it to be born in a higher status in its future life, just as is the case with humans, whereas a disgraceful act does the opposite for all species alike.

The mere suggestion that other animals are capable of performing meritorious acts shows that Buddhism attributes to them certain features, such as morality, which are denied to them (or at least de-emphasized) in mainstream Judaism and Christianity. In fact, some scholars maintain that Buddhism attributes to nonhuman animals features such as tender feelings, altruism, peaceful coexistence with one another, gratitude, heroism, and the ability to grasp the teachings of the Buddha.⁶⁹ These features present nonhuman animals as moral, spiritual, and, to some extent, rational beings. Moreover, the notion of karma, according to which each individual reaps the results of its deeds, and which applies to human and nonhuman animals alike, implies that nonhuman animals can be regarded as “responsible” beings, which has “a positive, even if not thoroughly worked out, implications for the abilities of other animals.”⁷⁰

In Waldau’s opinion, however, all of these themes represent only one of “two different ‘faces’” of the Buddhist attitude toward other animals.⁷¹ The second face, “which is as ancient and central a part of the tradition as is the first,” is much less “friendly” to them.⁷² Although, as stated earlier, other animals are highly present in Buddhist texts, attitudes toward them, Waldau argues, are “not based on extensive knowledge of [their realities]” and, therefore, they rather indicate that “early Buddhists were unconcerned with exploring the actual realities of other animals” and that “their comments about other animals merely reflect the dominant

⁶⁸ Ibid., 27.

⁶⁹ Harris, “A Vast Unsupervised Recycling Plant,” 208; Chapple, *Nonviolence to Animals*, 23; Story, *The Place of Animals in Buddhism*, 11. *Jātaka* are tales relating episodes from the Buddha’s previous lives.

⁷⁰ Waldau, *The Specter of Speciesism*, 141.

⁷¹ Waldau, “Buddhism and Animal Rights,” 87.

⁷² Ibid., 88.

‘ideology’ of the time regarding the complete inferiority of all other animals.”⁷³ Although the *Jātaka* and “other animal-oriented stories” do display them in a positive light, with their anthropomorphic character, Harris argues, it is questionable whether they truly deal with animals. Indeed, Harris notes that “the animals [in these stories] are not really animals at all, for at the end of each story the Buddha reveals that the central character was none other than himself in a former life, with his monastic companions playing the supporting role.”⁷⁴ About the *Jātaka*, Waldau notes that “the overall view of [primates] is quite negative” and that “rarely is any other primate that is not the Bodhisattva [the Buddha in a previous life] pictured as an individual with any significant abilities.”⁷⁵

Waldau also contends that, in contrast to the sense of continuity between the worlds of human and nonhuman animals that is usually considered to be characteristic of this tradition, there is “a competing sense of an even *more radical discontinuity* that is an aspect of Buddhist thinking on this subject.”⁷⁶ This discontinuity is first reflected at the linguistic level. The Pali word *Tiracchānagata*, Waldau notices, “means ‘the state or realm of animals’” which humans are not part of.⁷⁷ Therefore, just as in Western and many other cultures, Buddhism lumps all nonhuman animals together while keeping humans outside their realm, which clearly points to a deeply perceived gap between their worlds.

Although the cycle of rebirth seems to evoke continuity between the worlds of human and nonhuman animals, this doctrine is still based on derogatory views of other animals, because rebirth as a nonhuman animal is considered a punishment for heinous deeds committed in a preceding human life cycle.⁷⁸ Indeed, in Buddhism, the realm of other animals is considered one of the three “states of woe”⁷⁹ and “evil paths.”⁸⁰ This view is based on this tradition’s assumption that the “animal sphere” involves “much suffering and little happiness” because animals are supposed to be “stupid, possess no wisdom, and are always killing one another.”⁸¹ Consequently, the world of nonhuman animals is disgraced and inferior to

⁷³ Ibid., 98.

⁷⁴ Harris, “A Vast Unsupervised Recycling Plant,” 208.

⁷⁵ Waldau, *The Specter of Speciesism*, 119.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 139 (emphasis in the original).

⁷⁷ Waldau, “Buddhism and Animal Rights,” 90.

⁷⁸ Chapple, *Nonviolence to Animals*, 23.

⁷⁹ Waldau, “Buddhism and Animal Rights,” 90.

⁸⁰ Zennō Ishigami, “Animals,” in *Encyclopaedia of Buddhism*, ed. G. O. Malalasekera, fasc. 4 (Colombo, Ceylon: Government Press, 1965), 669.

⁸¹ Ibid.

that of humans, and “in the Buddhist ideal worlds there are no animals ... other than humans.”⁸² Furthermore, other animals cannot reach the state of *nirvāna*, the ultimate bliss after one is released from the wheel of rebirth, without going through a human life cycle first. Wisdom or knowledge, which is sometimes attributed to nonhuman animals, is more consistently considered to be the monopoly of humans.⁸³ Indeed, because Buddhism considers rebirth in a nonhuman animal form to be a punishment for bad karma accumulated in a previous human life cycle, the mere birth in one such form is therefore considered a moral failure. This idea is also inconsistent with the comparatively positive notion of responsibility, attributed to other animals (discussed earlier), because it presents them not only as morally deficient beings, but also holds them responsible for this deficiency.

Despite its centrality, the nonviolence precept has not promoted the well-being of other animals to the degree that is often claimed, and in some instances, it seems to have created complications that may lead to even more pain inflicted on certain animals. In the Buddhist tradition, what is considered the main negative consequence of killing is the accumulation of bad karma, hence reflecting concern for the active party (usually the human being perpetuating the act of killing) more than the victim (usually the nonhuman animal that is killed). As a consequence, the tradition developed ways for surmounting this difficulty, which aim at the protection of the perpetrator of killing and not the victim, such as leaving the killing to someone else, performing ceremonies of pacification or atonement, and evoking the Buddha’s name.⁸⁴ In some instances, to avoid direct killing and consequently the bad karma that ensues from it, adherents may resort to “cruel indirect methods [of killing] considered less immeritorious for the perpetrator.”⁸⁵

Furthermore, although the First Precept is unequivocally clear about the issue of taking life, Lambert Schmithausen states that “other kinds of injuring like hurting or torturing ... are not explicitly prohibited by the wording of the standard form of the Precept.”⁸⁶ As a consequence, Buddhism not only tolerates, but in some instances promotes serious harms that, although short of death, seriously compromise the well-being

⁸² Waldau, “Buddhism and Animal Rights,” 90.

⁸³ Waldau, *The Specter of Speciesism*, 119.

⁸⁴ Lambert Schmithausen, *Buddhism and Nature* (Tokyo: The International Institute for Buddhist Studies, 1991), 26.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 42.

of certain animals. In his account of the breaking of wild young elephants by Buddhist Thais, Douglas Chadwick provides a detailed and graphic description of the process, which involves the infliction of acute pain.⁸⁷ Although such practices may have nothing to do with Buddhism as such, Waldau takes the Buddhist tradition's acceptance of the captivity of elephants – which is known to take place through brutal means – as a sign of tacit acknowledgement of such practices. Aside from the pain, Waldau points out that the mere captivity of an elephant curtails its interests and changes it “from a potential member of an elephant society to a creature unfit for either human or elephant society.”⁸⁸ Although “the failure of some elephants to thrive in captivity despite being given food and shelter” is recognized in Buddhist texts, Buddhism does not condemn the instrumental use of these animals, and “some statements even seem to suggest that it is *moral* to allow such harms to exist.”⁸⁹

Animals in Jainism

Jainism shares with Buddhism its great concern for all types of animal life, a concern which is even more profound in this tradition than it is in the Buddhist one and which extends to a number of beings that, outside Jainism, are usually perceived as devoid of life. Nonhuman beings in Jainism are classified according to the senses through which they experience the world. At the lowest level, one finds beings presumably possessing only the sense of touch, a category that includes the four elements (earth, water, air, and fire) as well as plants and microorganisms.⁹⁰ The next level introduces the sense of taste and includes creatures such as worms and snails. Smell added to the two previous senses characterizes the next level of beings, consisting of most insects. The fourth level adds sight to the previous senses and includes butterflies, flies, and bees. The fifth level – consisting of mammals, birds, reptiles, and a number of other animal categories – introduces the sense of hearing.⁹¹ Although

⁸⁷ Douglas Chadwick, *The Fate of the Elephant* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1994), 378.

⁸⁸ Waldau, “Buddhism and Animal Rights,” 101.

⁸⁹ Waldau, *The Specter of Speciesism*, 149.

⁹⁰ Kristi Wiley, “Five-sensed Animals in Jainism,” in *Communion of Subjects* (see note 5 in Introduction), 250–1. See also Christopher Chapple, “Inherent Value without Nostalgia: Animals and the Jaina Tradition,” in *Communion of Subjects* (see note 5 in Introduction), 241.

⁹¹ Chapple, “Inherent Value without Nostalgia,” 141–2.

these classifications do not include human beings, it is still remarkable that five-sensed animals are perceived as rational beings, having minds with the ability to reason. Indeed, it is believed that these animals can “remember the past ... think about the future, and ... make choices about the nature of their actions,”⁹² which, at least in theory, enables them to undertake a salvation journey. In any case, among all animals, it is only humans and five-sensed beings that seem to have the ability to “affect their destiny, positively or negatively, through the choices they make.”⁹³ In addition to their rationality and self-consciousness, these animals are often portrayed in the Jain tradition as moral beings that “can choose between right and wrong” and spiritual beings that can “assume the religious vows.”⁹⁴

Consideration for other animals in Jainism is manifested in a number of ways, the most prominent of which are vegetarianism and the establishment of special refuges for certain species.⁹⁵ About the first, Roy Perrett observes that “[i]f the Buddhist tradition has sometimes seen *ahimsā* as compatible with non-vegetarianism, Jainism has not. Jainism,” Perrett continues, “very definitely advocates the practice of *ahimsā* and it underpins the prohibition on meat-eating that is the first of the basic restraints ... that are observed by all Jains.” In addition to meat, observing Jains also abstain from the consumption of alcohol, honey, and figs “for such substances are believed to be richly populated by single-sense creatures.” Furthermore, “even animals that have died naturally are forbidden” in this religion because dead flesh is considered a breeding ground for single-sense creatures. Perrett concludes that the “strict adherence to vegetarianism has long been considered the hallmark of the Jaina and constitutes the most basic expression of the Jain commitment to *ahimsā*.”⁹⁶

Attention to other animals is not restricted to abstention from the consumption of their flesh, but extends to the protection of their feelings as well.⁹⁷ Perhaps because life and different degrees of sentiency are believed to characterize physical beings, including the four elements and plants, “the ideal death for a Jaina, lay or monastic, is to fast to death,

⁹² Kristi Wiley, “Five-sensed Animals,” 252.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 253.

⁹⁴ Chapple, “Inherent Value without Nostalgia,” 242.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 253.

⁹⁶ Roy W. Perrett, “Moral Vegetarianism and the Indian Tradition,” in *Ethical and Political Dilemmas of Modern India*, eds. Ninian Smart and Shivesh Thakur (Houndmills, Basingstoke, London: The Macmillan Press LTD, 1993), 84–5.

⁹⁷ Chapple, “Inherent Value without Nostalgia,” 245.

consciously making the transition to the next birth while not creating any harm to living beings.”⁹⁸

Jainism’s attention to other animals is expressed in active ways as well. The most manifest of these are the medical institutions specializing in the treatment of certain animal species. Chapple notes that according to a 1955 survey, “there were more than three thousand such animal homes at that time” in India.⁹⁹ The services of such hospitals extend even to insects, for which a number of these hospitals set aside rooms that “serve as receptacles for dust sweepings brought by Jainas.”¹⁰⁰ Furthermore, Kristi Wiley notes how “[t]hroughout the ages, Jains have actively tried to dissuade others from killing animals, be it in the context of ritual sacrifice, for food, or merely for sport.” One of their success stories consists of their impact on the Mughal emperor Akbar (r. 1564–1605) who, because of their influence, issued “a decree to free caged birds” and banned the slaughter of animals during the most sacred Jain festival.¹⁰¹

Notwithstanding this great attention to other animals’ welfare, from the perspective of an animal-rights advocate Jainism can still be criticized for many of its views and treatments of other animals. First, even though this tradition regards the world of human and nonhuman animals as a continuum and allows for cross-species rebirth, this doctrine, as in Buddhism, is based on derogatory views of other animals, because a nonhuman rebirth is considered a punishment for loathsome deeds committed in a preceding human life cycle, hence implying the debasement of nonhuman animals. Likewise, the classification of other animals into different levels from which the human race is totally excluded while even the supposedly more developed (five-sensed) animals are seen as a subcategory of the animal world points to a perceived gap separating humans from other animals. This view is based on the assumption that human beings differ from other animals in essence, whereas other species, regardless of how far removed from one another, differ only in degree.

The notion of karma, in which, as explained earlier, there is concern for the active rather than the passive party, results in a number of situations in which nonhuman animals are led to suffer unnecessarily, at least from the standpoint of certain animal-rights advocates. For example, in the hospitals described, a number of animals are so sick that it may appear more charitable to put an end to their suffering. Euthanasia, however, is

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 245.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Wiley, “Five-sensed Animals in Jainism,” 253.

not an option in this case mainly out of fear of darkening the karma of the person who undertakes the act of killing, and because according to the karmic view, the suffering animals deserve their predicament because of their own dark karma accumulated in a previous life cycle.¹⁰²

Jainism can also be criticized for applying human – particularly Jaina – standards to all animals. For instance, vegetarianism, which is regarded as a moral virtue in the case of humans, is recommended for other animals as well, including carnivorous ones. As a consequence of this attitude, the ideal behavior for a lion, for example, would not differ from that of a human being or an herbivorous animal, even if only the former would suffer fatal consequences from its abstention from meat. Although this attitude may seem to be of minimal consequence, as it appears to be restricted to hypothetical or mythical scenarios, one example can illustrate how its impact can extend to real life situations. In medical centers for birds set up by Jaina families in Delhi, sick predator birds are not admitted “on the grounds that they harm other creatures and that they violate the *ahimsā* principle.”¹⁰³ Therefore, these birds are not only regarded as suffering from a moral flaw (violating the *ahimsā* principle), but are in a way punished for it by being denied treatment from which other birds can benefit.

Contemporary ethical and philosophical considerations

Even though in major world religions the lower status of other animals has been considered a given, and care for other species, when advocated, has usually been founded on emotional grounds, the notion of other animals’ inferiority to humans is now increasingly challenged, and the case for other animals is occasionally made on rational bases. This attitude, however, is far from becoming universal. In the West, the modern philosophical discourse about other animals covers a wide spectrum of views about their natures, status, ethical treatment, and legal standing. At one end of this spectrum we find views denying other animals any significant status, whereas at the other we find voices calling for equality between human and nonhuman species. Here I would like to focus on the views of two major philosophical schools that share the position that other animals are entitled to equal respect with humans. The first is the utilitarian

¹⁰² Chapple, “Inherent Value without Nostalgia,” 247.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 246.

school, whose leading exponent with respect to animals is Peter Singer, and the second is that of animal rights, whose main representative is Tom Regan.

Utilitarianism and the principle of equal consideration

The founding principle pertinent to the animal question in the utilitarian school is that all sentient beings have interests that deserve to be taken into consideration. The sentience element was initially advocated to counter the effect of certain presumptions about nonhuman animals that are called upon not only to relegate them to an inferior status, but also to justify their unrestricted exploitation.¹⁰⁴ Therefore, Bentham, one of the early utilitarians who discussed the issue of nonhuman animals, argued that “The question is not, Can they *reason*? nor Can they *talk*? but, Can they *suffer*?”¹⁰⁵ Although to Bentham the plea for sentience was simply made to extend compassionate treatment to other animals, to Singer it has become a ground for an egalitarian attitude toward them. Because other animals can feel pain just as human beings do, Singer maintains that there is no ethical ground that would justify the prioritization of humans’ interests in this respect over those of other animals. Singer insists that self-awareness, intelligence, or other characteristics “are not relevant to the question of inflicting pain.”¹⁰⁶

An important point in Singer’s philosophy, however, is the distinction between the issues of inflicting pain and of taking life. “It is not arbitrary,” he maintains, “to hold that the life of a self-aware being, capable of abstract thought, of planning for the future, of complex acts of communication, and so on, is more valuable than the life of a being without these capacities.”¹⁰⁷ Although this distinction is irrelevant in the case of inflicting pain, it is relevant to the issue of vegetarianism, one of the important dimensions of the animal question. Singer admits that

As a matter of strict logic, perhaps, there is no contradiction in taking an interest in animals on both compassionate and gastronomic grounds. If a person is

¹⁰⁴ The most prominent of these is the Cartesian view, according to which other animals are perceived as machines, devoid of inner experiences, including sentience. See Gary Steiner, “Descartes, Christianity, and Contemporary Speciesism,” in *Communion of Subjects* (see note 5 in Introduction), 118.

¹⁰⁵ Jeremy Bentham, *An Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (London: University of London, 1970), 283.

¹⁰⁶ Singer, *Animal Liberation*, 21.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 21–2.

opposed to the infliction of suffering on animals, but not to the painless killing of animals, he could consistently eat animals that have lived free of all suffering and been instantly, painlessly slaughtered.¹⁰⁸

Singer still strongly recommends vegetarianism, however, his motives belong more to the psychological and political realms than to the purely ethical one. First, he considers eating meat in the present circumstances, that is, the intensively produced meat, to be morally wrong because its production involves the infliction of suffering on nonhuman animals before and upon their killing. He also suspects those who take gastronomical interest in nonhuman animals to relax their standards in case they conflict with their gustatory preferences. Another reason is that he considers the boycott of meat a political tactic against the intensive method of raising certain nonhuman animals. Singer is not categorically opposed to the idea of experimenting on sentient beings either, although he makes it a precondition that all other options be exhausted beforehand and that the benefit should be believed to significantly outweigh the sacrifice to make it justifiable.

At first glance, it may seem difficult to accuse Singer of speciesism, because, at least on a theoretical level, he puts all beings that share a number of relevant characteristics in the same bracket regardless of which species they belong to. However, his utilitarian approach, which assigns value to interests rather than to individuals, has been regarded as incompatible with the principles of equality and justice.¹⁰⁹ Singer, as mentioned earlier, does not object to the sacrifice of the interests of one or a few individuals if the aggregate interest to be reaped outweighs the sacrificed interests. For example, if by experimenting on one or a few individuals (who, for that matter, could be nonhuman animals or humans who satisfy certain prerequisites, such as lacking family ties, suffering from severe mental illnesses, and/or other characteristics that deprive them from having a meaningful life), a larger number of human and nonhuman animals can reap much greater advantages, such as discovering the cure to some major illnesses, then this act becomes morally advisable. Although this rule does not operate by species criteria, it is still viewed as inequitable toward the individuals whose interests are sacrificed, especially because these individuals by their very nature cannot give consent to such acts.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 164.

¹⁰⁹ Maithili Schmidt-Raghavan, "Animal Liberation and Ahimsā" in *Ethical and Political Dilemmas of Modern India*, ed. Ninian Smart and Shivesh Chandra Thakur (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993), 68.

Singer has also been criticized for not regarding death in itself as evil. As a preference utilitarian, what he considers as evil is the satisfaction or frustration of a certain individual's preferences. Because he considers humans to be the only beings endowed with self-consciousness, in his opinion they alone can have a conscious preference for life as such. Therefore, he considers that "humans, and humans only, suffer loss from death even if that death is painless."¹¹⁰

Animal rights and the inherent value approach

Regan rejects the utilitarian approach in which individuals are viewed as mere receptacles for feelings of pleasure and pain and proposes instead that each individual has inherent value, which emanates from its own subjectivity. "The inherent value of individual moral agents," he explains, "is to be understood as being conceptually distinct from the intrinsic value that attaches to the experiences they have (e.g., their pleasures or preference satisfaction)."¹¹¹ In his view, taking into consideration the element of sentience alone is insufficient, as it does not give enough weight to the deeper reality of many animals as complex beings.

The way Regan builds his argument is through a number of analogies. After arguing that moral agents have value in themselves, which is independent from their experiences, possessions, morality, lovability, and so forth, he rejects the restriction of the notion of inherent value "to all moral agents and only to moral agents" as arbitrary. "If we postulate inherent value in the case of moral agents and recognize the need to view *their* possession of it as being equal," he contends, "then we will be rationally obliged to do the same in the case of moral patients." He concludes that "All who have inherent value thus have it equally, whether they be moral agents or moral patients."¹¹² As a consequence, Regan, unlike Singer, is unequivocal in his advocacy of vegetarianism and categorically opposes most types of harming (certain) animals.

The dissimilarity between Regan's and Singer's ethical theories emanates largely from their different perceptions of nonhuman animals' natures. Although both philosophers agree on the sentience dimension, which leads them to the principle that other animals should not

¹¹⁰ Julian Franklin, *Animal Rights and Moral Philosophy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 9.

¹¹¹ Tom Regan, *The Case for Animal Rights* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004, 2nd ed.), 236.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 235–40.

be gratuitously harmed, Regan, in addition, attributes a number of characteristics, such as self-consciousness and possession of beliefs and desires, to one-year-old (or more) mammals. Regan's theory about other animals' self-awareness rests on three foundations: common sense, ordinary language, and evolution. Although he admits that common sense and the way we talk about certain animals are not sufficient foundation for attributing to them characteristics such as self-consciousness, because many people reject such uses of language as merely anthropomorphic, he still puts the burden of proof on those who deny the weight of these arguments. He thinks that "unless or until we are shown that there are better reasons for denying that these animals have beliefs and desires, we are rationally entitled to believe that they do."¹¹³ He derives from the theory of evolution an even stronger endorsement to his viewpoint. The similarity between the anatomy and physiology of humans and many other animals, according to the evolutionary theory, suggests similarities between their mental lives as well.¹¹⁴ Furthermore, "the survival value of consciousness," which, he argues, clearly played a crucial part in the survival of the human species, must have played a similar role in the survival of many other species.¹¹⁵ Regan is aware of possible charges of anthropomorphism when he attributes to other animals some characteristics that are traditionally thought to be the monopoly of humans. He however counters this charge by warning us about the "other side of the anthropomorphic coin," that is, human chauvinism.

General considerations. A few remarks are now due. Both Singer's and Regan's views are largely based on the imagined nature, rather than the actual realities, of nonhuman animals, a charge that Waldau directed to Buddhism and that seems to apply to other religious traditions as well. This attitude, however, is the result of two major difficulties: the inaccessibility of other animals' minds and the question of where to draw the line.

INACCESSIBILITY OF ANIMALS' MINDS. The mental and psychological state of other animals is far from being a point of consensus among philosophers and other scholars. "If it is too difficult to come to grips with consciousness in humans, where we at least have some personal experience to guide us,

¹¹³ Ibid., 78.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 18.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 19.

how are we to consider consciousness in other species?” retorts Clive Wynne.¹¹⁶ Daisie and Michael Radner wonder “How can we possibly know what animals are experiencing, when we have no direct access to their inner lives and the insuperable barrier between us and them undercuts any attempt at analogical reasoning from their behavior?”¹¹⁷ Donald Griffin explains that a major philosophical issue in assessing nonhuman animals’ mental nature “is the problem of other minds, that is, how we can come to understand minds other than our own, including those of other species.”¹¹⁸ Thus, knowing what is in another’s mind or how another being experiences certain things can be a philosophical dilemma even in inter-human relations. Assuming that other animals have minds, in the absence of a complex inter-species system of communication, this dilemma becomes much more heightened.

In their attempt to understand how other species experience the world and to decide which species are ethically entitled to sensitive treatment, modern thinkers have had to rely on various approaches, a few of which are scientific investigation, evolution theory, and even common sense. Each of these approaches, however, has its intricacies. Although the main charge against religion, as discussed in previous sections, is that of anthropocentrism, modern approaches may be suspected of being limited by different degrees of anthropomorphism. These approaches often take the human experience as the yardstick in the evaluation of the experiences of other species. This attitude may even be characterized of simply expanding the circle of anthropocentrism to include those species that are more like us in the human moral spheres.

A number of claims made about nonhuman animals suggest anthropomorphic attitudes toward them. For example, in dealing with the question, “Can any animals use language?” Regan points to “the efforts to teach primates, including gorillas and chimpanzees, a language such as the American sign language (ASL) for the deaf.”¹¹⁹ Thus, the assumption appears to be that only human language counts as a language. Communication systems that other species use are not acknowledged as possible variations of language, or at least as effective communicative systems. This analogy not only seems to take no notice of other animals’

¹¹⁶ Wynne, *Animal Cognition*, 15.

¹¹⁷ Daisie and Michael Radner, *Animal Consciousness* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1996), 8.

¹¹⁸ Donald R. Griffin, *Animal Minds: Beyond Cognition to Consciousness* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), ix.

¹¹⁹ Regan, *The Case for Animal Rights*, 12.

communicative skills, which have been well documented through various scientific studies. It also seems to tacitly require other animals to become like humans (learn human language) before humans can recognize their ability to communicate with one another.

Efforts to teach primates human language, however, remain very limited and, more importantly, misleading because their results are quite equivocal to say the least. Radner and Radner note that with “primate language research, the more the data are examined the less impressive they are.”¹²⁰ When videotapes of the utterances of a chimpanzee were analyzed, “it became apparent that most of his signing was prompted by his teachers. The pattern of discourse was quite different from that of a human child.”¹²¹ However, the primates’ failure is only with respect to learning human language. The same two authors indeed ask,

Was it to [the chimpanzee] Sarah’s advantage to learn the abstract concepts “color of,” “same as,” and so on? From one point of view it was: she could earn herself extra bananas or a hug if she did. But like a student taking an examination, she gets the same reward for learning as for giving the appearance of learning. Students sometimes have occasion to put their knowledge to real use after they leave the classroom. Sarah never leaves it. Language for her is a task to be mastered, not a means for broadening her horizons.¹²²

The problem with these attempts is that the primates not only had “to communicate by our language; they had to talk about what humans are accustomed to talk about.” By contrast, “[s]tudies of the natural communicative behavior of chimpanzees, both in the wild and in experimental settings, reveal a rich repertory of natural signals.”¹²³

In his attempt to probe which animals are self-conscious, Regan also writes,

The greater the anatomical and physiological similarity between given animals and paradigmatic conscious beings (i.e., normal, developed human beings), the stronger our reasons are for viewing these animals as being like *us* in having the material basis for consciousness; the less like *us* a given animal is in these respects, the less reason we have for viewing them as having a mental life. Because some animals frequently differ from *us* in quite fundamental ways in these respects, it is not unreasonable to view them as utterly lacking in consciousness. Like automatic garage doors that open when they register an electronic signal, or like the pinball machine that registers the overly aggressive play of a competitor and

¹²⁰ Radner and Radner, *Animal Consciousness*, 160.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 153.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 159.

¹²³ *Ibid.* 158–9.

lights up “Tilt!” some animals may be reasonably viewed as making their “behavioral moves” in the world without any awareness of it.¹²⁴

Clearly, then, in Regan’s opinion, the human being (specifically, what we usually take to be normal, developed human) is the standard measure, and the farther a given species’ anatomy is from ours, the less one should worry about its interests, or even consider it as having an interest that requires our attention and concern.

WHERE TO DRAW THE LINE? This anthropomorphic attitude is partly imposed by another consideration, which represents the second major challenge in this respect: where to draw the threshold line? Obviously, to adopt a moral theory that gives equal consideration to all forms of animal life is practically impossible.¹²⁵ Therefore, the need to draw the line somewhere is imperative. However, the actual drawing of such a line is very controversial. Singer, who anchors his ethical theory in the element of sentience, seems to be comfortable with the idea that some “very primitive organisms” such as oysters, clams, mussels, and scallops may be eaten because “[m]ost mollusks are such rudimentary beings that it is difficult to imagine them feeling pain, or having other mental states.”¹²⁶ Although drawing the line at the mollusk level may be considered inclusive of a rather large variety of animal forms, Singer still accepts that in some circumstances (such as biomedical experimentation), the line can be drawn at the human level¹²⁷ because “it is worse to kill a normal adult human, with a capacity for self-awareness, and the ability to plan for the future and have meaningful relations with others, than it is to kill a mouse which presumably does not share all of these characteristics.”¹²⁸ Obviously, this view is based on the assumption that other animals lack the mental capacities that normal adult human beings have. Singer cites

¹²⁴ Regan, *The Case for Animal Rights*, 76 (emphases added).

¹²⁵ The case of Jainism, which could be brought here as a proof that it is possible to include all animals in one’s moral sphere, has been noteworthy for its impracticality, which may account in part for this faith’s limited reach. Moreover, even for Jainas, a rigorous discipline in this respect is observable only by the “most advanced monks” who have to abstain from “digging, bathing, lighting or extinguishing fires, or fanning.” Chapple, *Nonviolence to Animals*, 10.

¹²⁶ Singer, *Animal Liberation*, 178.

¹²⁷ Although, as noted, Singer argues that experimenting on certain humans who satisfy certain requirements should be allowed as well, these requirements seem to be designed in a way as to exclude virtually all humans. This view, as suggested by Franklin, could be strategic, but Singer’s aim is only to discourage unnecessary experimentation on other animals and not to shock us into performing no experiments at all.

¹²⁸ Singer, *Animal Liberation*, 20.

“anticipation, more detailed memory, [and] greater knowledge of what is happening,” as being among the “superior mental powers” that belong to “normal adult humans” to the exclusion of other animals.¹²⁹

Regan’s perception of other animals and the type of rights he is willing to extend to them leads him to draw the line differently. As stated earlier, Regan perceives those animals that are most like us, in particular mammals, as having “beliefs, desires, memory, a sense of the future, self-awareness, and an emotional life, and can act intentionally” and, this is where he chooses to draw his species line. Even within this category, however, the line still needs to be redrawn, for mammals do not have these mental and emotional capacities at every stage of their physical development or deterioration, just as is the case with humans. Consequently, Regan chooses to defend the rights of “mentally normal mammals of a year or more.”¹³⁰

In his investigation of Christian and Buddhist attitudes toward other animals, Paul Waldau chooses to focus on different groups of animals, to which he refers as the key animals, consisting of great apes, elephants, and cetaceans. Waldau’s rationale for making this particular choice is that these species are “by consensus, among the more complicated of animals.”¹³¹ What accounts for this complexity, he maintains, are these species’ “large brains, communications between individuals, prolonged periods of development in complex familial and social envelopes, and levels of both social integration and individuality that humans can recognize.”¹³² Thus, his criteria consist of features that are comparable to human ones (for example, prolonged periods of development) and that humans can perceive easily as a result of the size of the animals in question and the fact that they echo human features.

As I hope will become clear over the course of this book, the Qur’anic presentation of other animals and why they matter differs in considerable respects from the representations found in other major faith traditions. On the other hand, from the Qur’anic perspective, just as with other religious approaches, accessing other animals’ minds is not problematic, because this text presents itself as proceeding from the perspective of divine omniscience. Therefore, an exploration of the Qur’anic depiction of other animals’ natures may suggest other ways of drawing threshold lines.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 59–60.

¹³⁰ Regan, *The Case for Animal Rights*, 77–8.

¹³¹ Waldau, *The Specter of Speciesism*, 60.

¹³² Ibid.

Exegesis, Relevant Notions, and Exegetes

The Qur'anic presentation of nonhuman animals has had a significant impact on Muslims' attitudes toward the animal world. A general survey of medieval *adab* works on animals, such as al-Jāhiz's (d. 255/868) *Kitāb al-ḥayawān*, al-Damiri's *Ḥayāt al-ḥayawān al-kubrā* (d. 808/1405), and al-Majlisi's (d.1111/1699) *Tawḥīd al-Mufaḍḍal*, for example, reveals a sense of wonder vis-à-vis other species, which, upon scrutiny, turns out to be closely linked to the Qur'anic presentation of animals as loci of miraculous signs upon which humans are invited to reflect to know more about their Creator. This impact, however, does not seem to have extended fully to perceptions of the nature of nonhuman animals. Although the Qur'an, as we shall see, presents nonhuman animals as spiritual, moral, and psychologically complex beings, Islamic literatures engage with such presentations only intermittently. One of the two major exceptions to this seemingly general rule are (1) the genre of Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsīr*), which, owing to its quasi exhaustive nature, leaves no Qur'anic animal theme unaddressed, and (2) a medieval fictional work, Ikhwān al-Ṣafā's animal epistle, *The Case of the Animals versus Man Before the King of the Jinn*, which engages with Qur'anic animal themes at considerable depth. Exploration of *tafsīr* works is pertinent to this study not only because it explicates certain aspects of Qur'anic animal themes, but also because examination of this genre can show us the extent to which the divine scripture has shaped the views of some Muslims on animals. Ikhwān al-Ṣafā's animal epistle, on the other hand, although technically not part of the *tafsīr* genre, still plays an exegetical role and, in a way, may be the most focused commentary on Qur'anic animal themes. Thus, in this chapter I will introduce the *tafsīr* genre and highlight some of its

distinctive features. In addition, I will give a brief summary of Ikhwān al-Ṣafā's epistle. I will also call attention to some of the factors that have had an effect on the exegetes' understanding of Qur'anic animal themes, particularly the notion of anthropocentrism, the Neoplatonic notion of the Great Chain of Being, and the two notions of egalitarianism and hierarchy. Finally, I will introduce the exegetes whose works are considered in this book.

GENERAL FEATURES OF QUR'ANIC EXEGESIS

Tafsīr is a genre that endeavors to interpret the Qur'an and elucidate its ambiguous parts, not merely to satisfy an intellectual need for understanding the most central text in a believer's life or a desire for studying a text deemed by Muslims to be the epitome of literary perfection, but also to serve the practical purpose of deriving and inferring rules and recommendations that Muslims would implement in their lives. In addition to commenting on the entire Qur'an, the genre of *tafsīr* is also a medium for "polyvalent reading of the [Qur'anic] text,"¹ wherein previous exegetical authorities are cited. Therefore, Qur'anic exegesis consists of commentaries not only on the Qur'an, but also on previous commentaries. This, thus, results in continual reevaluations of and interactions with earlier interpretations and constant enrichment of the genre.

Because of the centrality of the text it interprets, *tafsīr*, a genre that has continued to grow in the last fourteen centuries, is one of the most highly developed branches of Islamic scholarship; it is also one of the broadest.² In addition, the fascination with the word of God shared by scholars from various walks of intellectual life, coupled with a desire to find in the sacred text validation for various intellectual and theological tendencies and sectarian allegiances, has resulted in not only a large number but also a wide variety of exegetical works. The very large volume and extensive variety of *tafsīr* combined with the large amount of Qur'anic material pertinent to the animal question make it impossible to survey the entire genre on this matter. In fact, surveying even a representative sample is hardly an option, not only because a fully representative one, were it to

¹ Norman Calder, "Tafsīr from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr: Problems in the Description of a Genre, Illustrated with Reference to the Story of Abraham," in *Approaches to the Qur'an*, ed. G. R. Hawting and Abdul-Kader A. Shareef (London: Routledge, 1993), 103.

² For an appreciation of the breadth of this branch of Islamic thought, see Walid Saleh, *The Formation of the Classical Tafsīr Tradition: The Qur'an Commentary of al-Tha'labī* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2004), 1–2.

be made, would still be beyond the scope of this work, but also because of the difficulty of developing adequate criteria for the selection of such a sample.

The heterogeneous nature of *tafsir* is one of the causes behind the difficulty of obtaining a representative sample. In modern, particularly western, scholarship, a number of typologies have been proposed for the categorization of this genre, taking into consideration a number of thematic and formal criteria. These classifications have obviously contributed to a better understanding of this genre. However, because of the heavy overlap between the assumed subcategories, these typologies are hardly helpful in providing a clear-cut division between the supposed subgenres that could assist in selecting a good representative sample. Even what might be considered mutually exclusive criteria, such as sectarian ones, can simultaneously be present in the same work of *tafsir*.³

What may alleviate this difficulty, however, is that some of the factors that led to this genre's diversified nature hardly have any effect on the interpretation of the Qur'anic animal themes. One example can illustrate this point. The Qur'an often attributes to nonhuman beings, whether animate or inanimate, actions and features that are not perceivable to the human senses and mind, such as a spiritual dimension implied in all creatures' practice of *tasbīḥ* (glorification of God). Obviously, this attribution causes a tension between the Qur'anic presentation of other beings and the way the latter are usually perceived in human experiences. This tension is typically alleviated in one of two ways: either through a literal reading, which grants more authority to the Qur'an and attributes the inability to perceive such traits in other creatures to human limitations, or through a figurative reading, which, by contrast, gives more authority to the human mind and as such understands the text in ways that conform with what is believed to be a "normal" human experience. Although literal readings are not necessarily or consistently a better or more accurate approach, in this specific case, this figurative reading can be indicative of an anthropocentric attitude, as it insists on denying to other creatures, including other animals, any complexity or spiritual depth that may have an impact on their status.

A look at some texts shows that both attitudes are equally reflected in a number of the so-called exegetical subgenres. In Shi'ism, the exegete al-Fayḍ al-Kāshānī (d. 1091/1680) opts for a literal reading,⁴ whereas

³ Ibid., 20.

⁴ Al-Fayḍ al-Kāshānī (known also as al-Kāshī and al-Qāshānī), *Tafsir al-ṣāfi* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-A'lami li-al-Maṭbū'āt, 1979), 3: 195.

al-Ṭabrisī (d. 548/1153) opts for a figurative interpretation.⁵ Among the Sufis, we find that ibn ‘Ajība (d.1224/1809) chooses a literal reading of this theme, attributing the failure to understand other creatures’ glorification of God to humans’ spiritual shortcomings;⁶ ibn al-‘Arabi (d. 638/1240) in his *tafsīr* chooses a figurative interpretation;⁷ whereas al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1072) takes a stand in between, allowing literal *tasbīḥ* only in the case of living beings, while interpreting the *tasbīḥ* of inanimate beings figuratively.⁸ This dichotomy survives into the modern era, in which, for example, al-Mutawallī al-Sha‘rāwī (d. 1418/1998) sides with the literalist camp,⁹ whereas al-Ṭāhir ibn ‘Āshūr (d. 1393/1973) supports the figurative one.¹⁰

Thus, the differences in these exegetes’ stands on this point cannot be ascribed to sectarian, mystical, or diachronic factors. In fact, in the case of sectarianism this conclusion should come as no surprise considering that other animals were not part of the political and ideological conflicts that were behind sectarian divisions, and as such, they are not expected to have been the focus of any political or intellectual debates that led to these divisions. Whatever the reason behind this, the fact is that ideas about their nature and status were neither examined in the light of nor affected by sectarian ideologies. Even Sufis, many of whom were particularly close and sensitive to the well-being of other animals, do not seem to have been consistently preoccupied by the theoretical question of other animals’ nature. Regardless of what one might think of the accuracy of modern typologies of *tafsīr* or the lack thereof, these typologies are probably not our best guide in the selection of representative works.

What may be a more useful typology in our case is the medieval one of *tafsīr bi-al-ma‘thūr* (tradition-based exegesis) versus *tafsīr bi-al-ra‘y* (opinion-based exegesis), not only because of the great attention this typology received in the history of Islamic exegetical sciences, but also because of the claim made by the *ma‘thūr* school about its keenness to

⁵ Abū ‘Alī al-Faḍl ibn al-Ḥasan al-Ṭabrisī, *Majma‘ al-bayān fī tafsīr al-Qur‘ān* (Beirut: Maktabat al-Ḥayāt, 1961), 15: 53.

⁶ Abū al-‘Abbās Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn ‘Ajība, *Al-Baḥr al-madīd fī tafsīr al-Qur‘ān al-maḥīd* (Cairo: 1999), 3: 202.

⁷ Muḥyī al-Dīn ibn al-‘Arabi, *Tafsīr al-Qur‘ān al-karīm* (Beirut: Dār al-Andalus, 1978), 1: 717.

⁸ Abū al-Qāsim ‘Abd al-Karīm ibn Hawzīn Al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā‘if al-ishārāt* (Cairo: Dār al-Kātib al-‘Arabi), 4: 22.

⁹ Muḥammad Mutawallī al-Sha‘rāwī, *Tafsīr al-Sha‘rāwī* http://www.elsharawy.com/sharawy.aspx?p_name_english=s17 (accessed Feb. 23, 2011).

¹⁰ Muḥammad al-Ṭāhir ibn ‘Āshūr, *Tafsīr al-taḥrīr wa-al-tamwīr* (Tunis: al-Dār al-Tūnisīyya li-al-Nashr, 1984), 15: 114–5.

achieve an “objective” understanding of the Qur’an. Although the assertions made by the advocates of this school in this respect should not be accepted at face value, as *ma’thūr* interpretations of the Qur’an are in fact not any less partisan than other ones, the theoretical foundations of this method still seem to offer a more adequate approach for our purpose, as the results of my investigation are related to the *ma’thūr/ra’y* distinction.

Tradition-based versus opinion-based exegesis

The *ma’thūr* methodology consists mainly of an attempt to limit the sources that can speak authoritatively for the Qur’an. In the opinion of ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328), who is accredited with the establishment of “the theoretical foundation for this trend,”¹¹ the only parties who can speak reliably for the Qur’an are the Qur’an itself, the Prophet, his companions, and, to a lesser extent, the generation that followed the companions, known as the *tābi’ūn*.

The Qur’an is deemed to provide the key to its own meaning mainly through an intertextual approach, for “what is stated ambiguously in one place is explicated in another, and what is stated in a concise manner in one place is expounded in another,” ibn Taymiyya explains. If no explanation can be obtained through this method, one can look for answers in the prophetic tradition, which is deemed to have an explanatory and illustrative quality vis-à-vis the Qur’an, and which is considered a form of revelation. In fact, the prophetic tradition may be considered even a living translation or illustration of the Qur’an because “whatever decision the Prophet issued was emanating from his understanding of the Qur’an.”¹²

The Prophet’s companions, especially the most prominent and knowledgeable amongst them, are considered reliable authorities in this respect mainly because of their closeness to the Prophet and their presence at the time the Qur’an was revealed, which provided them with direct knowledge of the context of revelation, deemed essential in understanding this scripture. Moreover, ‘Abd Allāh ibn ‘Abbās (d. 68/687), the most prominent exegete among them, is believed to have been blessed with a special prayer from the Prophet, thanks to which he became particularly insightful in this field.

¹¹ Walid Saleh, *The Formation of the Classical Tafṣīr*, 16.

¹² Taqī al-Dīn ibn Taymiyya, *Al-Tafṣīr al-kabīr* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1988), 2: 231.

The *tābiʿūn* (the generation that followed the Prophet and his companions) do not enjoy the same level of knowledge authority as the previous three sources. Nonetheless, because some of them had the privilege of studying directly at the hands of the companions, especially those who were most knowledgeable in *tafsīr*, such as ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿAbbās and ʿAbd Allāh ibn Masʿūd (d. 32/653), and because some of the later authorities in exegetical sciences, such as al-Ṭabarī, cited their opinions, it is believed that they can be accepted as exegetical authorities in matters in which they do not contradict one another. When they do, however, none of them is given more weight than the others.¹³

The notion of *al-tafsīr bi-al-maʿthūr* emerged and developed as a reaction to that of *al-tafsīr bi-al-raʾy* (opinion-based exegesis). Ibn Taymiyya deems the latter unreliable, arguing that the exegetes who follow it either approach divine scripture with a number of preconceived notions that they want to impose on it or because they strip the text of its context. Therefore, bias and de-contextualization are the two main reasons that may impede the exegete from grasping the “true” meaning of the Qur’an.¹⁴ According to Ibn Taymiyya, biased exegetes can affect the meaning in two ways, either by stripping the word of its true intended meaning (*yaslibūna lafza al-Qurʾān mā dalla ʿalayhi wa-urīda bihi*) or by imposing on it a new meaning that was not intended for it (*yaḥmilūnahu ʿalā mā lam yadulla ʿalayhi wa-lam yurad bihi*). The reason why an exegete would do this, Ibn Taymiyya maintains, is his allegiance to a certain sect or his adherence to an ideological school.¹⁵

The *maʿthūr/raʾy* typology has been criticized on a number of grounds. First, it has been criticized for failing to “provide a sufficient analytical tool” for the *tafsīr* genre because it lumps together a wide variety of Qur’anic exegesis under the umbrella of “*raʾy*” (opinion) without considering the differences, tensions, interactions between, and social and spiritual functions of these works and without acknowledging their valuable contributions to the understanding of the Qur’an.¹⁶ Moreover, this division has been characterized as an ideological one, “aimed at consolidating the

¹³ Taqī al-Dīn Ibn Taymiyya, *Muqaddima fī uṣūl al-tafsīr* (Kuwait: Dār al-Qurʾān al-Karīm, 1971), 93–105.

¹⁴ For more on the importance of “context” in Ibn Taymiyya’s views, especially its importance in the phenomenon of language, see Mohamed Mohamed Yunis Ali, *Medieval Islamic Pragmatics: Sunni Legal Theorists’ Models of Textual Communication* (Richmond, Surrey: Curzon Press, 2000), 87–140.

¹⁵ Ibn Taymiyya, *Muqaddima fī uṣūl al-tafsīr*, 82.

¹⁶ EI2, s.v. “*Tafsīr* (a.),” (by Andrew Rippin).

mainstream Sunnī interpretive tradition and undermining the non-Sunnī approaches as well as deviant Sunnī interpretations.” More importantly, the difference between the two types of *tafsīr* is deemed to be fictitious because most of “the *tafsīr bi-’l-ma’thūr* is in reality a *tafsīr bi-’l-ra’y*.”¹⁷

Despite the validity of these criticisms, the emphasis that this school lays on the element of prejudice makes this typology fit for our purpose because I believe that a type of prejudice (anthropocentrism, with its presumptions about humans’ special status) has played an important role in shaping our understanding of the Qur’anic animal themes. This, of course, is not to imply that the *ma’thūr* school representatives were necessarily successful in achieving a rigorous implementation of their methodology or in pinpointing all forms of bias that may interfere with our understanding of this scripture. In fact, if this were the case, ibn Kathīr’s *tafsīr*, considered one of the best implementations of the *ma’thūr* theory, would have had the least anthropocentric of the Qur’anic animal themes. This, however, turns out not to be the case. The reason seems to be that ibn Kathīr was perhaps unaware of his own anthropocentric views and consequently did not question them. This is unlike, for example, al-Qurṭubī, whose approach consists of a combination of both approaches (*ma’thūr* and *ra’y*), which perhaps shows that combining both approaches is a better course. In fact, “responsible use of *ra’y*,” which al-Qurṭubī advocates, may lead to a more critical approach that would help the exegete question his own preconceptions.

In this study I intend to apply the *ma’thūr* methodology specifically to Qur’anic animal themes, making use mostly of the intertextual approach and taking occasional recourse to the Prophetic tradition. In accordance with the *ma’thūr* method, I would like also to ensure, to the extent of what is possible, that we have comprehensive understanding of key Qur’anic animal-related concepts. Although I do not suspect that Qur’anic commentators have deliberately tried to change the meaning of these concepts, a number of factors may still have blurred their meanings.

On the other hand, like all interpretations, mine is obviously inherently subjective. However, I would share with the reader that at the initial stage of this study I hardly anticipated that the Qur’an was so well adapted to such an egalitarian reading, so much so that I had to do substantial revision to my approach at an advanced stage of my research. Thus, although my personal views, naturally, do shape my understanding of Qur’anic animal themes, my work on the Qur’an has led me to question a number

¹⁷ Saleh, *The Formation of the Classical Tafsīr*, 16.

of my own anthropocentric presuppositions, thus contributing greatly to my current understanding of the animal world, including its human component.

Linear approach

One of the salient characteristics of the *tafsir* genre is its linear or “longitudinal” approach to the Qur’an. Hassan Hanafi explains that “Qur’anic interpretation has proceeded till now from the beginning to the end, from Surat al-Fatiha to Surat al-Nas, surah after surah, verse following verse, from right to left, according to the written order of surahs.”¹⁸

Although this approach has many advantages, such as providing commentaries on the entire text leaving no theme unaddressed, it has also been criticized on account of its “linear-atomistic” nature. In Asma Barlas’s opinion, this method has “failed to recognise the Qur’ān’s thematic and structural coherence” and resulted in “a partial, piecemeal and decontextualised (mis)interpretation that not only fails to see hermeneutic connections between different themes in the Qur’ān, but which also projects patriarchal and misogynistic meanings to it.”¹⁹ Mohammad Fadel also argues that Qur’anic exegesis, “which was dominated by the atomistic methodology of verse-by-verse interpretation, allowed the misogynistic assumptions of the reader to dominate the text.”²⁰ Thus, this approach is criticized for its failure to reach a coherent and consistent view of gender-related topics.

Qur’anic animal themes have also suffered from this method. The “linear-atomistic” approach, indeed, may have been one of the primary reasons why the uniqueness of the Qur’an’s view of animals has not been fully captured in the *tafsir* genre. Exegetes often display conflicting positions and understandings of the Qur’an’s stipulations on animals as a result of this method. Although in some of their discussions they do not hesitate to depict nonhuman species, including even insects, as intelligent beings whose mental faculties surpass those of most humans, in others

¹⁸ For more on this point, see Hassan Hanafi, “Method of Thematic Interpretation of the Qur’an” in *The Qur’an as Text*, ed. Stefan Wild (Leiden; New York: E. J. Brill, 1996), 195.

¹⁹ Asma Barlas, “Women’s Readings of the Qur’ān,” in *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur’ān*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 262.

²⁰ Mohammad Fadel, “Two Women, One Man: Knowledge, Power, and Gender in Medieval Sunni Legal Thought” *IJMES*, 29, 2 (May 1997): 185–204.

they go back to commonly held notions about nonhuman animals, thus perpetuating prevalent preconceptions about them.

The notable exception to this general rule is Ikhwān al-Ṣafā's 22nd epistle, *Fī aṣnāfi al-ḥayawānāti wa-ʿajāʿibi hayākilihā wa-gharāʿibi aḥwālihā*, translated in English as *The Case of the Animals versus man Before the King of the Jinn*.²¹ Although this work does not fall within the *tafsīr* genre, it still engages with Qur'anic animal themes at significant depth.

This narrative consists of a fictional legal suit in which nonhuman animals take human beings to the court of the King of the Jinn on account of their oppression of other species. Both parties rely heavily on the Qur'an in this litigation, however, nonhuman animals are consistently able to refute the human characters' anthropocentric reading of the divine revelation and to show that the Qur'anic worldview is in fact far more egalitarian than human beings tend to present it. To cite one example, the Ikhwān's human characters consider themselves superior to other animals because of their physical appearance and cite the Qur'anic verse, "We created the human being (*al-insān*) of the best stature" (95/*al-Tīn*: 4) to corroborate this claim. The nonhuman animal characters, however, contend that the point of this verse is not to compare humans to other creatures; it is rather to indicate that God has chosen for humans the most appropriate height that fits their particular needs. Thus, the verse means that man is created "neither tall and thin nor short and squat but at a mean."²²

Strangely, however, in spite of their persuasion nonhuman animals lose their case and are even portrayed as happily accepting the outcome of the litigation. However, the authors manage to give victory to their human characters only when they depart from Qur'anic animal themes. When all personal, social, and religious arguments prove to be of little help, human characters resort to the theme of the afterlife. Those who will continue to live eternally (i.e., humans), they maintain, are decidedly superior to those whose existence will cease upon the end of their earthly lives (presumably other animals). Nonhuman animals disagree. Eternal life is a sign of superiority only for those who will dwell in heaven. At this point, the Ikhwān's human characters assert that all humans will indeed dwell eternally in heaven, thanks to the Prophet Muḥammad's intercession

²¹ Translated by Lenn Goodman, (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1978); (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), there are a few, yet important, differences between the two editions.

²² Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', *The Case of the Animals versus Man*, (2009), 111; Arabic text, 50.

on their behalf, an idea that is not explicitly mentioned in the Qur'an.²³ Unsurprisingly, many critics have been disappointed by this narrative's outcome, although some tried to account for it.²⁴ Notwithstanding this puzzling end, the work itself remains an admirable attempt at questioning anthropocentric preconceptions and engaging with Qur'anic animal themes.

Relevant notions

Anthropocentrism

Anthropocentrism, the most important factor impinging on the interpretation of Qur'anic animal themes, is a fairly complex concept that requires some analysis. It should be noted that a deep and satisfactory exploration of this topic is beyond the scope of this book, so I will raise only a few points that I deem relevant to this discussion. Among other things, this term designates the seemingly inescapable fact that humans can see the world *only* from human lenses. Wynne says,

When we look at animals, we may recognize that they are not people but we still can't help seeing them from our human perspective – this is called “anthropocentrism”. Just as tourists visiting a new country make the foreign more manageable by comparing it with home ... so, when considering animal psychology, we inevitably start with our human minds and compare what animals do to what we do. Are they intelligent or conscious? Do they think or feel? All these are anthropocentric questions.²⁵

Wynne concludes that

Since we are human we can probably never be entirely free from anthropocentrism. But just as astronomers gradually came to recognize that the Earth was not the centre of the solar system and developed a cosmology that placed our planet in its appropriate place, at a particular point in a particular galaxy, so we may hope that we can develop an animal psychology that moves humans from centre stage and sees each species as being at the centre of its own world.²⁶

In this sense, anthropocentrism is hardly a value-laden concept. To a large extent, it designates a matter-of-fact characteristic of the human mind.

²³ In another edition, reflected in the later (2009) translation of the epistle, the Ikhwān fall back on arguments successfully refuted by their animal characters earlier in the narrative, thus clearly contradicting themselves.

²⁴ See for example Zayn Kassam, “The Case of the Animals versus Man: Toward an Ecology of Being” in *A Communion of Subjects* (see footnote 5 in Introduction), 160–9.

²⁵ Clive D. L. Wynne, *Animal Cognition: The Mental Lives of Animals* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 2.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

Because of many differences between us and other species, we will perhaps never be able to ask the right questions about them – the sorts of questions that might lead us to knowing them better – or if we do, the task of answering such questions might be, to say the least, long and difficult, and most likely impossible or infinite.

In addition to being a set of outlooks that are simply shaped by the nature of the human mind, anthropocentrism refers also to a set of values that are the result of intersubjective processes of socialization and indoctrination that go beyond the individual. In this sense, anthropocentrism has many parallels with other “centric” worldviews. Humans tend to understand better, value more, and prioritize the interests of the circles that they consider closer to them. This attitude is not necessarily objectionable but may become so if it is dismissive of other groups, or if in the process of attending to its own interests, the concerned group violates the rights of others. Like other centric outlooks, however, if one is willing to acknowledge such anthropocentric feelings for what they presumably are, for instance, a set of cultural and ideological attitudes that are generationally transmitted and reinforced, such attitude may gradually be changed. In this sense, anthropocentrism would also be perceived as a limitation, however, still something that we may hope to gradually unlearn.

Rather than being approached as a limitation or inability to know other species for what they are – an attitude that would inspire humility – anthropocentrism, which throughout human history seems to have been rarely approached critically, often designates a feeling of superiority; more often than not it has referred to the attitude that humans consider themselves the most valuable species or created beings. This self-centered view is sometimes tempered by the admittance of its subjective nature. W. H. Murdy explains that “mankind is to be valued more highly than other things in nature – by man. By the same logic, spiders are to be valued more highly than other things in nature – by spiders.”²⁷ The historically more prevalent anthropocentric attitude, however, is the one presenting humans’ centrality in the universe not simply as a relative idea or a matter of perspective; humans are often presented as the focal point of the physical creation in an absolute sense. If spiders were given words or reason, it would be argued, they would probably readily admit this.

²⁷ W. H. Murdy, “Anthropocentrism: A Modern Version,” in *Ethics and the Environment*, eds. D. Schrer and T. Attig (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1983), 13.

Humans' superiority appears to be founded on self-evident facts. A number of characteristics supposedly account for our species' uniqueness and presumably for its special status. According to the 1992 *American Heritage Dictionary*, for example, *man* is defined as "a member of the only extant species, *Homo sapiens*, distinguished by a highly developed brain, the capacity for abstract reasoning, and the ability to communicate by means of organized speech and record information in a variety of symbolic systems."

In Joan Dunayer's opinion, however, this "self-congratulatory description" not only "exaggerates human uniqueness" but also is arbitrary. She asks, "why should this capacity [typically human type of language] be the criterion for superiority? Because it is the one that *we* possess?" Dunayer adds that "In the same self-serving and otherwise arbitrary manner, an individual might pronounce 'I have great physical strength, so physical strength signifies superiority.'"²⁸

Anthropocentric attitudes are perceivable also in selective and uninformed or misinformed comparisons between humans and other species. Very often, such comparisons would contrast an idealized image of humans to a distorted image of other animals, which, in such contexts, would generally be lumped together in an indistinct group. Thus, humans would be portrayed as the only species capable of abstract reasoning, having a conscience, free will, immortal soul, and so forth, whereas other species are granted no or little share of these skills and features, although such views can hardly be empirically verified. More importantly, there seems to be equally compelling reasons to qualify humans as the only species "distinguished by a highly developed narcissism [and] the capacity for routine institutionalized cruelty."²⁹ Even by human standards, it is easy to see that intelligence has not always been a blessing, neither for our own species nor for the world around us.

In the case of Qur'anic exegesis, it is also possible to draw a distinction between casual and formal anthropocentrism, both of which have affected the interpretation of Qur'anic animal themes. Casual anthropocentrism is generally the result of unexamined preconceptions about the world and seems to have unacknowledged cultural background to it. It is usually accompanied by the assumption that other animals' dumbness

²⁸ Joan Dunayer, "Sexist Words, Speciesist Roots" in *Animals and Women: Feminist Theoretical Explorations*, eds. Carol J. Adams and Josephine Donovan (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 21–2 (emphasis in original).

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 22.

and inferiority to humans are a given. Despite this assumption, when the holders of this attitude encounter Qur'anic themes that point in the opposite direction, such as other animals' possession of linguistic/communicative faculties, they accept them without much questioning. Casual anthropocentrism is therefore able to tolerate conflicting views about other animals, on occasion considering them dumb creatures and asserting their inferiority to humans, and at other times accepting that there is more to them than what the human mind is familiar with or can rationalize.

Formal anthropocentrism, on the other hand, is a consciously elaborated attitude that, taking for granted humans' superiority to other earthly creatures, tries to account for this superiority using both scriptural and rational arguments. What is noticeable about the formally anthropocentric exegete, especially from the medieval era, is the particular influence of Hellenistic thought on his views. One of the chief characteristics of Hellenism, Francis Peters explains, is a "speculative but rational" theology about the nature of God and the universe.³⁰ Hellenistic writers and those who were drawn to their intellectual approach placed great trust in the mind's capability to comprehend and account for all phenomena in the world. Thus, the entire reality of the animal world, much like the reality of almost everything else, is assumed to consist of what humans perceive of them. If nonhuman animals do not have a language that humans can understand, it means they have no language. Thus, absence of evidence becomes the equivalent of evidence of absence. As a consequence of this rational attitude, the Hellenized exegete, owing to the underlying Aristotelian logic that upholds the laws of noncontradiction, is usually found to deny or at least play down the element of mystery and to be less tolerant of contradictory views. When confronted with Qur'anic passages that seem to attribute to other animals "mysterious" features (i.e., features that are not immediately perceivable through human senses and mind), the exegete who holds this type of anthropocentrism often attempts to explain them away one way or another.

The Great Chain of Being

A particular Hellenistic legacy that had an especially important impact on the perception of other animals' nature and the definition of their status in certain Islamic intellectual circles is the notion of the Great Chain

³⁰ Francis. E. Peters, *The Children of Abraham: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006, New ed.), 18.

of Being. This conception holds that the universe is arranged in a hierarchical order “from the meagerest kind of existents, which barely escape nonexistence, through ‘every possible’ grade up to ... the highest possible kind of creature.”³¹ Three principles make up the fundamental components of this concept: plenitude, continuity, and gradation. *Plenitude* denotes that the universe is utterly full, containing the utmost conceivable variety of beings from the highest to the lowest. *Continuity* implies that beings on this chain represent a continuum where features of one being or class of beings shade-off into the next. In accordance with this principle, each being on the chain is seen as sharing one or more attributes with its neighbors on both its lower and upper sides. *Gradation* refers to the fact that beings on this chain are arranged in a unilinear order according to “their degree of perfection.”³² As a consequence of this feature, any difference “of kind is treated as necessarily equivalent to difference of excellence, to diversity of rank in a hierarchy.”³³ Another fundamental characteristic of the chain is its deeply entrenched determinism. Each being has its fixed place on it, determined by its degree of perfection, thus resulting in the fact that beings are generally banned from either upward or downward mobility.

The three components of this concept find their roots in both Plato’s and Aristotle’s thoughts. The principle of plenitude is traceable back to Plato, who put forward the idea that the world must contain “*all possible beings*” because the “‘best soul’ could begrudge existence to nothing that could conceivably possess it.”³⁴ Continuity and gradation, on the other hand, are mainly the outcome of Aristotle’s work. Although, as Arthur Lovejoy explains, Aristotle did not hold that “all organisms can be arranged in one ascending sequence of forms,” and apparently saw that “a creature which may be considered ‘superior’ to another in respect to one type of character may be inferior to it in respect to another,” it is still believed that “it was he who chiefly suggested to naturalists and philosophers of later times the idea of arranging (at least) all animals in a single graded *scala naturae* according to their degree of ‘perfection.’”³⁵

Despite the important roles that both Aristotle and Plato played in providing the main ingredients of this worldview, the chain itself is

³¹ Arthur O. Lovejoy, *The Great Chain of Being: A Study of the History of an Idea* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966), 59.

³² *Ibid.*, 58.

³³ *Ibid.*, 64.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 50 (emphasis in the original).

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 58.

mostly the work of Plotinus. Indeed, the latter organized the above elements into “a coherent general scheme of things”³⁶ and passed it down to later generations of thinkers. This notion was destined to have a long and thriving life in the West. Lovejoy maintains that it has been “one of the half-dozen most potent and persistent presuppositions in Western thought,” and “until not much more than a century ago, probably the most widely familiar conception of the general *scheme* of things.”³⁷ The far-reaching impact of this idea permeated a large number of scholarly fields, including literature, philosophy, theology, science, and metaphysics, and along with other Hellenistic legacies, extended to the entire family of Abrahamic traditions.

Hierarchy and egalitarianism

Hierarchy and egalitarianism, whether at the cosmic or the more limited levels of human society, are issues with which human civilizations in general – and not only the ancient Greeks – have grappled. Although engagement with this topic has been an ongoing preoccupation for the human mind, not all human societies have come up with the same answer as to which system intrinsically reflects the state of things or at least is an ideal to be sought. As we have seen earlier, Neoplatonism not only views the entire cosmos as arranged in a hierarchical order, but also regards this hierarchy as an ideal system because it allows for the existence of the best possible world. Similarly, traditions originating in the Indian subcontinent portray the world as a hierarchical structure, albeit one that resembles a ladder rather than a chain, because beings in it generally are capable of upward mobility and are not safe from downfalls.

By contrast, at least in the human social sphere, monotheistic religions are presented as having “a certain egalitarian element,” which entails that “in principle, at least, [these] religions treat their adherents as brothers, regardless of the difference in their origins.”³⁸ This egalitarianism has neither been translated nor is it necessarily translatable into social justice and equality, not even into promoting egalitarian ideals. Often, in fact, it is limited to the “conviction that human beings are equal in the sight of God.”³⁹ The attainment of true and ultimate justice is deferred to the next world. Nonetheless, the mere possibility of this egalitarian orientation has

³⁶ Ibid., 61.

³⁷ Ibid., vii (emphasis in the original).

³⁸ Louise Marlow, *Hierarchy and Egalitarianism in Islamic Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 2.

³⁹ Ibid.

served to counter the influence of hierarchical ideals and provided a basis for occasional contestation of the prevalent hierarchical systems and values within the human sphere. Therefore, even if this “egalitarian element” falls short of abolishing social hierarchy or diminishing its appeal, it still remains an important factor in the general interplay between egalitarian and hierarchical tendencies.

Even though this egalitarian orientation is characteristic of the three Abrahamic traditions, it is much more manifest in the youngest of the three. “Islam,” Louise Marlow writes, “is probably the most uncompromising of the world’s religions in its insistence on the equality of all believers before God.”⁴⁰ Naturally, social stratification and hierarchical consciousness were and still are part of the Islamic social reality, as they were of other civilizations. Nonetheless, “in an Islamic context,” Marlow notes, “they take on somewhat different forms, partly ... because the Islamic religious tradition could not be used easily to support the principle of hierarchy.”⁴¹ This has hence created “moral difficulties” for the “élite who benefited from hierarchical forms of social organization in the Islamic world.”⁴²

Combined with Arab tribalism and with Muslims’ early political success, Islamic egalitarianism, indeed, had “strong social implications” in this religion’s early history. “Arab monotheists,” Marlow notes, “even those of lowly origins, became to a substantial degree equal members of a new polity.”⁴³ However, even if the Islamic ethos continued to play a role in “the partial softening of social boundaries,” which characterized the sedentary premodern societies that became part of the Muslim world,⁴⁴ this egalitarian impulse was gradually watered down.⁴⁵ Although a number of factors have contributed to this situation, Marlow argues that it is mostly a result of Iranian social models and hierarchical ideals that the Islamic tradition became increasingly hierarchical. These models and ideals, Marlow explains, “proved at once to be embedded deeply enough to withstand the defeat of the political order that had provided its context, and flexible enough to find a respected place in the polity that replaced it.”⁴⁶

⁴⁰ Ibid., xi.

⁴¹ Ibid., 10.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., 6.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 6.

⁴⁵ For more on this point, especially the role played by the ‘*ulamā*’ in this process, see the second part of Marlow’s *Hierarchy and Egalitarianism*, 93–177.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 90.

Whether or not this egalitarian orientation in Islam extends to other beings is a more complex question. Beyond the human sphere, profound intellectual discussions about other beings' status in Islamic tradition extended mainly to angels, about whom there are different positions as to whether or not they are more perfect than human beings, whereas the inferiority of nonhuman earthly animals probably seemed too obvious to require any justification. In the case of angels, the two main criteria taken into consideration in the evaluation of their status are moral excellence (which corresponds to total obedience to God), and natural predisposition (which roughly consists of inability to sin). Because the vast majority of, or all, angels are considered to be obedient to God, there is generally no significant contestation of their moral excellence. However, whether or not this quality carries much weight in the comparison between them and humans is affected by the second criterion. The fact that angels are supposedly created with a natural disposition to obey God tends to lift their status in some views (because thanks to this feature they remain sinless, unlike the vast majority of, or even all, humanity) and to lower it in others (because, unlike humans, they do not need to struggle to attain this spiritual excellence).⁴⁷ What is notable about these two criteria is that, from an Islamic perspective, they apply to nonhuman earthly animals as well, because they also are considered obedient to God, and generally endowed with the same predisposition to be in this state of obedience. Despite this, discussions of the status of nonhuman animals seem to center more around the element of rationality than that of morality or obedience to God.

THE EXEGETES

The four exegetes who have been selected for this study, al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210), al-Qurṭubī (d. 671/1273), and ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373), not only offer the advantage of being situated at various positions of the *ma'thūr* versus *ra'y* spectrum, hence to an extent representing its full range, but also are generally acknowledged as the authors of landmark works in Qur'anic exegesis. Despite certain debates surrounding aspects of the works of some of them, particularly al-Rāzī

⁴⁷ For more on this point, see Fehmi Jadaane, "La place des anges dans la théologie cosmique musulmane," *Studia Islamica*, 41 (1975): 58–60; see also Lutpi Ibrahim, "The Question of the Superiority of Angels and Prophets Between az-Zamakhsharī and al-Bayḍāwī," *Arabica*, 28, 1 (Feb., 1981): 65–75.

and Ibn Kathīr, all of them are squarely within the orthodox Sunnī tradition, and their works continue to enjoy great recognition up to the present day. Ibn Kathīr, whose *Tafsīr al-Qurʾan al-ʿaẓīm* is considered a prime example of the *maʿthūr* approach, comes at one end of our spectrum, whereas the opposite end is occupied by al-Rāzī. Both al-Ṭabarī's and al-Qurṭubī's works lie between the two, with al-Ṭabarī leaning more toward the *maʿthūr* end of the spectrum, and al-Qurṭubī, toward the *raʿy* end.

Al-Ṭabarī

Abū Jaʿfar ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī was born toward the end of 224 or the beginning of 225/839 in Āmul, Ṭabaristān. After touring many Islamic cities in search of knowledge, he finally settled in Baghdad, where he remained fully dedicated to scholarship till the end of his life. His Qurʾan commentary *Jāmiʿ al-bayān ʿan taʾwīl āy al-Qurʾan* (The Comprehensive Clarification of the Interpretation of the Verses of the Qurʾan) was and continues to be one of his most acclaimed works in general and one of the most illustrious works in Qurʾanic exegesis in particular. It earned its distinguished reputation mainly because the author's painstaking efforts to compile, sift, and evaluate the Qurʾan commentaries of his predecessors and for being "the first to combine fully the various formative stages or elements of Muslim exegesis," hence "yielding a precious mine of information" to his contemporaries and subsequent generations down to our own times.⁴⁸ One of the particularly admired features of this commentary is that although the author "makes known his opinion" about the carefully selected exegetical material that he cites, "he does not censor opposing views."⁴⁹ Furthermore, the author's versatility in so many fields of Islamic knowledge contributed greatly to the quality of this work.

Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī

A native of Rayy, al-Rāzī was born in the year 543/1149 or 544/1150. His father, himself a scholar, introduced him to the two disciplines of Shāfiʿī *fiqh* and Ashʿarī *kalām*. Furthermore, al-Rāzī studied Islamic philosophy

⁴⁸ *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*, s.v. "Exegesis of the Qurʾan: Classical and Medieval," (by Claude Gilliot).

⁴⁹ Peter Heath, "Creative Hermeneutics: A Comparative Analysis of Three Islamic Approaches," *Arabica*, 36, 2 (July 1989): 186.

(*al-ḥikma*), and his writings indicate that he was conversant with many other disciplines, including medicine, geometry, and rhetoric.⁵⁰ Many of al-Rāzī's biographers portray him as a prodigy whose genius has often inspired wonder.⁵¹ Although it has been maintained that al-Rāzī used his genius and skills largely to refute, among other things, the arguments of *falsafa* (Hellenistic philosophy with a Neoplatonic filter) and Mu'tazilī *kalām* and to reinforce the doctrines of the mainstream Sunnī tradition,⁵² his writings, Ayman Shihadeh argues, indicate that he evolved from strictly classical Ash'arism in style and content to embracing "wholeheartedly ... the growing eclecticism of his milieu, and start[ing] to write works on *falsafa*, logic, and medicine."⁵³

Like its author, al-Rāzī's *tafsīr*, *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb* (Keys of the Unseen) or *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr* (The Great *Tafsīr*), has been the subject of controversy. Al-Rāzī wrote it toward the end of his life, between the years 595/1199 and 603/1207,⁵⁴ at the peak of his intellectual, specifically philosophical, maturity.⁵⁵ Ibn Taymiyya is reported to have said that this work contains everything but *tafsīr*, to which the Qāḍī al-Quḍāt Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī al-Subkī (d. 756/1355) objected, saying that it contained "everything in addition to *tafsīr*."⁵⁶ Al-Rāzī does not break with the pre-existing exegetical tradition, ibn Taymiyya's criticism to the contrary notwithstanding. Although, as Norman Calder rightly notes, he "has brought into the [exegetical] game ... the philosophico-mystical discipline, derived from Avicenna, and marked in this work not only by its specific arguments but by the citation of authorities who scarcely belong within the tradition of *tafsīr*, [such as] Ghazālī and Avicenna," his processes of knowledge are

⁵⁰ Jamāl al-Dīn Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī Al-Qiftī, *Tārīkh al-Ḥukamā'* (Cairo: Mu'assasat al-Khānījī), 291–2.

⁵¹ See for example Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn ibn Aybak al-Ṣafādī, *al-Wāfī bi-al-wafayāt* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 2000), 4: 175–82; Tāj al-Dīn al-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt al-shāfi'iyya al-kubrā* (Cairo: Maṭba'at 'Isā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī wa Shurakā'uh, 1964), 8: 81–6; see also Giuseppe Gabrieli, "Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī," *Isis*, 7, 1 (1925): 9.

⁵² Al-Ṣafādī, *al-Wāfī bi-al-wafayāt*, 4: 177. Al-Ṣafādī writes that al-Rāzī "shook the [ḥalāsifa's] foundations (*zalzala qawā'idahum*)."

⁵³ Ayman Shihadeh, *The Teleological Ethics of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2006), 6–7.

⁵⁴ Although there are reports that al-Rāzī did not complete this *tafsīr* and that it was completed by one of his disciples, Shihadeh maintains that these reports seem to be unfounded. Shihadeh, *The Teleological Ethics*, 10.

⁵⁵ Shihadeh, *The Teleological Ethics*, 10.

⁵⁶ Al-Ṣafādī, *al-Wāfī*, 4: 179. Ibn Taymiyya's critical stand is hardly surprising, as al-Rāzī's *tafsīr* is considered a prime example of *al-tafsīr bi-al-ra'y*, which the Ḥanbalī scholar challenges seriously.

still traditional.⁵⁷ Al-Rāzī’s “reading, like that of other mainstream exegetes, is embedded in the [Qur’anic] text through the discovery of grammatical, lexical, or narrative devices, transparent to the tradition.”⁵⁸ This, however, does not negate the fact that he was a theologian “with a highly specific message” and that he was “more intent on the message than on listening to the tradition or even to the [Qur’anic] text.”⁵⁹ Thus, although al-Rāzī clearly venerates the divine scripture and on occasion does not hesitate to admit his inability to understand or to account for certain enigmas in it,⁶⁰ one of his main objectives in writing his *tafsīr* is still to demonstrate the compatibility of reason (as understood in Hellenized, especially Neoplatonic thought) and revelation. The former is often given precedence over the latter.⁶¹

Like other students of Hellenism, al-Rāzī accepts the concept of the Chain of Being as a valid worldview. In his opinion, “the human soul and body are the most superior (*ashraf*) of all other souls and bodies in the sub-lunar sphere (*al-‘ālam al-suflī*).”⁶² What accounts for the superiority of the human soul is that, in addition to possessing the three vegetative powers (i.e., nutrition, growth, and generation) and the two additional animal powers (feeling and self-propulsion), the human soul is the only one that has the rational power that “comprehends the reality of things and in it is manifested the light of divine knowledge.” As for the superiority of the human body, al-Rāzī cites a number of opinions encountered in different types of Islamic writings, such as the ability to eat with one’s hands; the superior quality of human food; the ability to express oneself lucidly whether through spoken, written, or sign language; and cumulative knowledge.

Al-Qurṭubī

Little is known about the life of Abū ‘Abd Allah Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad al-Qurṭubī. As his name indicates, he is a native of Cordoba, the Andalusian capital, which fell to the Christian conquest (633/1236) during his lifetime. Al-Qurṭubī lived in his homeland at least until 627/1230,

⁵⁷ Calder, “Tafsir from Ṭabari to Ibn Kathir,” 114.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 2000), 3: 98.

⁶¹ For more on this point, see P. Heath’s discussion of ibn Sinā and other philosophers’ approach to revelation (Heath, “Creative Hermeneutics,” 192–4).

⁶² Al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-ghayb*, 21: 10–11.

the year in which his father was killed.⁶³ During this time he studied a number of Islamic disciplines, including Arabic language and grammar, Mālikī *fiqh*, and Ḥadīth. His writings, as his biographers often note, are clear evidence of his extensive knowledge and great talent.⁶⁴ Because of political turmoil, he left the Iberian Peninsula and settled in Munyat Banī Khaṣīb in Upper Egypt, where he dedicated his life to scholarship and acts of devotion (*ibāda*) until he died in the year 671/1272. In addition to being a distinguished scholar, al-Qurṭubī is also remembered for his profound piety and ascetic lifestyle.

Al-Qurṭubī's biographers also emphasize the unique worth of his commentary, *al-Jāmi' li-ahkām al-Qur'an wa-al-mubayyin li-mā taḍammāna min al-sunna wa-āyāt al-furqān*, which, as Calder notes, "has some claim to being the most complete fulfillment of [the] possibilities [of the *tafsīr* genre]."⁶⁵ Al-Qurṭubī's genius, Calder explains,

lies in his presentation of past authorities, his embracing of polyvalent readings, his playing across the disciplines ... and his even-handed sensitivity to all the scholastic disciplines (except *taṣawwuf* ...). In all formal respects, Qurṭubī belongs firmly within the tradition initiated and defined by Ṭabarī; his artistry, however, is measurably greater. Less measurable is the sense of playfulness, or irony, which can be detected in his work and is perhaps product of the security that comes from working in an established discipline, fully mastered. It is in these senses that one might claim for his *tafsīr* that it is the most complete fulfillment of the possibilities of the tradition.⁶⁶

Unlike al-Rāzī and many other exegetes, al-Qurṭubī is credited with (and often praised for) being thoroughly in tune with the Qur'anic message. His methodology, which he lays out in the introduction to his *tafsīr*, consists of a combination of *ma'thūr* (tradition-based) and *ra'y* (opinion-based) approaches. Like al-Ṭabarī, al-Qurṭubī disapproves of "irresponsible" opinion-based exegesis, in which the word *ra'y* becomes synonymous with the word *hawā* (whim), and encourages responsible use of *ra'y*, which follows the rules and foundations laid down by generations of previous Muslim exegetes and scholars.⁶⁷

Al-Qurṭubī's *tafsīr* belongs also to the subgenre of legal exegesis, usually indicated by the word *ahkām* figuring in the title. Like other

⁶³ Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi' li-ahkām al-Qur'an* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2000), 4: 272.

⁶⁴ For example, see Shams al-Dīn al-Dhahabī, *Tārikh al-islām wa-wafāyāt al-mashāhīr wa-al-a'yān* (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, 1990, 2nd ed.), 50: 75; al-Ṣafādī, *al-Wāfi bi-al-wafāyāt*, 2: 87.

⁶⁵ Calder, "Tafsīr from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr," 109.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 109–10.

⁶⁷ Al-Qurṭubī, *al-Jāmi' li-ahkām al-Qur'an*, 1: 32–3.

representatives of this genre, such as the works of the Ḥanafī scholar's al-Jaṣṣāṣ (d. 370/981) and the Mālīkī judge ibn al-'Arabī (d. 543/1148), al-Qurṭubī not only endeavors to interpret the divine scripture but also “to demonstrate that the body of Islamic law may be derived in the first instance from the Qur'an.”⁶⁸ This emphasis on legal matters is manifest in al-Qurṭubī's discussion of the Qur'anic animal themes, as we will see.

IBN KATHĪR

Ismā'īl ibn 'Umar ibn Kathīr was born in 700/1300 or 701/1301 and lived most of his life in Damascus, which under Mamlūk rule had developed into one of the most dynamic intellectual and religious centers in the Islamic world. Ibn Kathīr was proficient in Ḥadīth, *qirā'āt* (Qur'anic readings), *fiqh* (jurisprudence), and Arabic lexicography. He counted among his teachers Taqī al-Dīn ibn Taymiyya, who had a particularly important impact on his intellectual growth.

Ibn Kathīr's *tafsīr* is an attempt to apply the hermeneutical theory of his teacher, ibn Taymiyya, to Qur'anic exegesis. His introduction, in which he lays down the major guidelines of his exegetical methodology, consists simply of a wholesale appropriation of ibn Taymiyya's discussion of this topic.⁶⁹ Therefore, for him, exactly as it is for ibn Taymiyya, opinion-based exegesis is simply “prohibited” (*ḥarām*), and the only interpretation of the Qur'an that is permitted is one that is *ma'thūr*-based, in which only the four sources cited earlier (i.e. the Qur'an, the Ḥadīth, the Prophet's companions, and the *tābi'ūn*) can speak reliably about the Qur'an.

Although in certain respects ibn Kathīr's *Tafsīr al-Qur'an al-'aẓīm* could be considered the antithesis of al-Rāzī's *Mafāṭih al-ghayb*, it has been the subject of the same conflicting opinions and even similar criticisms. Henri Laoust considers it to be “essentially a philological work,” and “very elementary” in style,⁷⁰ to which Jane McAuliffe objects, saying that this *tafsīr* “could more appropriately be characterized as the conscious and careful application of a well-developed hermeneutical theory.”⁷¹ In the same way that Calder criticizes al-Rāzī for not “being even-handed in his sensitivity

⁶⁸ *EI2*, s.v. “*Tafsīr*” (by Andrew Rippin).

⁶⁹ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr al-Qur'an al-'aẓīm* (Cairo: Mu'assasat Qurṭuba, 2000), 1: 6–19; ibn Taymiyya, *Muqaddima fi uṣūl al-tafsīr*, 93–115; Taqī al-Dīn ibn Taymiyya, *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1988), 2: 37–87.

⁷⁰ *EI2*, s.v. “Ibn Kathīr,” (by Laoust).

⁷¹ Jane Dammen McAuliffe, *Qur'anic Christians: An Analysis of Classical and Modern Exegesis* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 75.

to the scholastic disciplines,”⁷² he also notes that ibn Kathīr is “not even-handed in respect to the Islamic sciences, markedly preferring the dogmatic agenda over narrative.”⁷³ Polyvalent readings, one of the chief characteristics of the *tafsīr* genre, are considerably reduced in *Mafātih al-ghayb* as they are in *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿaẓīm*. The reason, Calder explains, is that both al-Rāzī and ibn Kathīr “in different ways, were theologians with a highly specific message, more intent on the message than on listening to the tradition or even to the text.”⁷⁴ Calder goes so far as to describe ibn Kathīr as having “little respect for the intellectual tradition of Islam as expressed in the literature of *tafsīr*, or indeed in any of the scholastic disciplines,”⁷⁵ and for “retrospectively cast[ing] the whole tradition into the shade of *al-tafsīr bi’l-ra’y*.”⁷⁶ However, ibn Kathīr’s exegetical views, like those of his teacher ibn Taymiyya, can be better understood in their historical context. In McAuliffe’s opinion, this *tafsīr* “bears fitting testimony to a period in Islamic history that was conservative in the positive sense of the term—an era that sought to identify and preserve the best of its received tradition.”⁷⁷ Even Calder admits that “polyvalent readings implied the danger of a tradition grown unmanageably large,” hence, leading to the opposite tendency of developing “[f]actors of choice, preference and scholarly or dogmatic exclusion,” which eventually led to works that are “firmly monovalent,” such as the *Tafsīr al-Jalālayn*.⁷⁸

Analysis of these exegetes’ discussion of Qur’anic animal themes, I hope, will allow us to obtain a better understanding of their work and their methodologies. Although advocates of the *ma’thūr*-based approach claim to have developed more effective techniques in the field of Qur’anic exegesis, deeper insights on Qur’anic animal themes, in my view, were reached by al-Qurṭubī and al-Rāzī, the two of the four exegetes who lean more toward the *ra’y*-based approach. By asking thought-provoking questions and engaging with certain Qur’anic animal themes in considerable depth, these two exegetes raised some remarkable questions, even if – because of the complexity of the topic – they were perhaps unable to offer fully satisfying answers. More will be said about these exegetes’ approaches to Qur’anic animal themes toward the end of the fourth chapter.

⁷² Calder, “Tafsīr from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr,” 111.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 124.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 127–8.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 120.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 130.

⁷⁷ McAuliffe, *Qurʾānic Christians*, 76.

⁷⁸ *I.e.*, the *tafsīr* authored by Jalāl al-Dīn al-Maḥallī (d. 864/1459) and Jalāl al-Dīn al-Ṣuyūṭī (d. 911/1505). Calder, “Tafsīr from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr,” 104.

PART II

ANIMALS IN THE QUR'AN

THE QUR'AN

The Qur'an has been described as the "most self-referential holy text known in the history of world religion."¹ Among its numerous "self-declarations," this text describes itself as a "Book/Scripture" (Kitāb)² and a "Recitation" (Qur'ān) that God "sent down" to His Prophet Muḥammad in order to "bring forth humankind from darkness unto light" (14/Ibrāhim: 1) and with the hope that humans "may ponder its revelations, and that people of understanding may reflect" (38/Şād: 30). The concept of *tanzīl* or *inzāl* (sending down), Muhammad Abdel Haleem explains, announces that "the origin of the Qur'an is from above and that Muḥammad is merely a recipient."³ Therefore, the Qur'an presents itself (and consequently is looked upon by Muslims) as the literal word of God. Additionally, the Qur'an informs us of its nature or function clearly as "guidance" and identifies humankind as its target audience (*hudan li-al-nās*, 2/al-Baqara: 185).

Being God's word, the Qur'an presents itself as proceeding from divine omniscience. God is "Knower of all things" and His knowledge encompasses "whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is in the earth"

¹ Stefan Wild, "We have sent down to thee the book with the truth..." "Spatial and temporal implications of the Qur'anic concepts of *nuzūl*, *tanzīl* and *inzāl*," in *The Qur'an as Text*, ed. S. Wild (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 140.

² For a discussion of the notion of the Qur'an as a Book or a Scripture, see Daniel A. Madigan, *The Qur'an's Self-Image: Writing and Authority in Islam's Scripture* (Princeton, Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001).

³ Muhammad Abdel Haleem, *Understanding the Qur'an: Themes and Style* (London, New York: I. B. Tauris Publishers, 1999), 3.

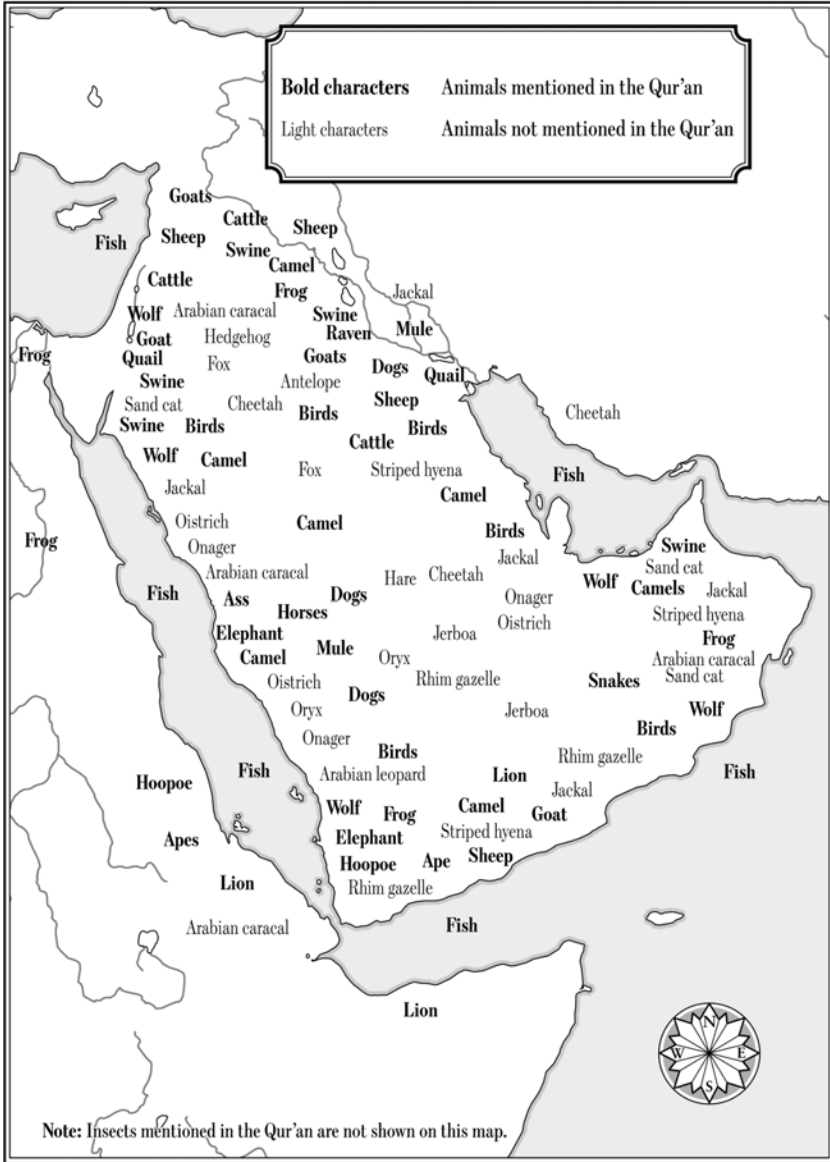
(5/al-Mā'ida: 97). "With Him are the keys of the invisible. None but He knows them. And He knows what is in the land and the sea. Not a leaf falls but He knows it, not a grain amid the darkness of the earth, naught of wet or dry but (it is noted) in a clear record" (6/al-An'ām: 59). Therefore, God's knowledge is at once all-inclusive and infinitely detailed. The Qur'an also says, "And there is not a *dābba* [animal] in the earth but the sustenance thereof depends on God. He knows its habitation and its repository. All is in a clear Record" (11/Hūd: 6). The Qur'an speaks authoritatively about many things that are hidden from or unknown to humans, including certain things that occur in other animals' minds or certain aspects of other animals' behavior that are not evident to humans. In contrast with God's full and comprehensive knowledge, humans are told that "Of knowledge you have been given but a little" (17/al-Isrā': 85). It is worth noting also that, although in some contexts the Qur'an limits itself to the discussion of what is accessible to humans, or even to the more restricted audience of Arabians, in others it proceeds to lift the veil from the world of the unseen to reveal some aspects of it to humans.

NONHUMAN ANIMALS OF ARABIA

The Qur'an was revealed more than fourteen centuries ago to Muḥammad, who lived in the Arabian Peninsula. The fauna of this area are believed to have "scarcely changed since pre-Islamic times, except for the disappearance of the lion which occurred long ago, and the more recent disappearance of the ostrich."⁴ The Qur'an does not refer to every species that existed in Arabia at the time of its revelation, but with the exception of the elephant, all of its land animals belong to the Arabian habitat. The reason why the elephant features among Qur'anic animals is that it was seen in Mecca a few decades before the advent of Islam (in the year of the Prophet's birth according to a number of traditions) as part of an attack waged against its holy shrine, the *Ka'ba*, an event to which the Qur'an dedicates a short sura.⁵ Additionally, although the Qur'an discusses hunting and contains a few references to wild animals and sea animals, its lenses are mostly focused on species that humans can see more regularly, such as domestic animals, birds, and certain insects.

⁴ E12, s.v. "*Ḥayawān*." Harrison notes also that the onager has vanished from the Arabian scene, and the Oryx and the Cheetah are dwindling. David L. Harrison, *The Mammals of Arabia* (London: Ernest Benn Limited, 1964), 1: 13.

⁵ For the Prophet's birth date, see Martin Lings, *Muḥammad: His Life Based on the Earliest Sources* (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions International, 1983), 21; see also, al-Ṣafaḍī, *al-Waḍī*, 1: 63.



MAP 1 Animals of the Arabian Region

As pre-Islamic poetry and archeological findings indicate,⁶ pride of place among Arabian fauna is given to the camel, the attributes of which

⁶ A. R. al-Ansary, *Qaryat al-Fau: A Portrait of Pre-Islamic Civilisation in Saudi Arabia* (Riyadh: University of Riyadh; New York: St. Martin's Press, 1982), 106, 110, 132–3, 143.

are “perfectly adapted to the conditions of life in hot deserts.”⁷ This animal species has played a key role in the lives of Bedouins, providing them with milk, meat, hides, wool, and fuel (obtained from camels' dung).⁸ Camels were also the principal means of transportation in the Peninsula as they were “preeminently suitable for journeys across long stretches of desert.”⁹ In addition to camels, Arabians also kept sheep, goats, and cattle, mainly for their milk, fleece, meat, and skins.¹⁰ Furthermore, by the time of the advent of Islam, horses had been part of the Arabian fauna for about a century. They were reared mainly “in the zone of steppe vegetation, such as that part of Nadjd watered by the Wādi 'l-Rumah,” because unlike camels, they were not tolerant of the generally arid desert environment.¹¹ Arabians also raised donkeys, which were “used for riding, drawing water, and as pack animals in the mountains, where their sure-footedness makes them more reliable than camels.”¹²

Arabian wild life included a large number of species, many of which caught the attention of pre-Islamic poets. However, the Qur'an mentions only a few of them. Among desert wild animals, the oryx (*mahāt*) and the onager (*ḥimār al-waḥsh*) are among the most frequently mentioned in pre-Islamic poetry, particularly in hunting scenes. James Montgomery points out that in onager similes “the poets often stress that the indigent hunter has a starving family to feed,” whereas the “oryx is hunted for its palatable flesh, which is a much prized delicacy, as well as for its pelt, which can be put to a number of uses.”¹³ Likewise, the antelope (*ghazāl*) enjoyed a favorable presentation in Arabic poetry and suffered the same fate as the oryx and the onager, because it was a “highly prized game alike for the nomad in search of sustenance and the prince whose main pastime was hunting.”¹⁴ Arabian wild life also included many smaller animals, such as the fox (*tha'lab*), hare (*arnab*), and hedgehog (*qunfud*). None of these, however, figure in the Qur'an. The only wild species that are mentioned in it are apes (*qirada*), the lion (*qaswara*), and wolf (*dhī'b*), in addition to a general reference to beasts of prey (*sabu'*).

⁷ EI2, s.v. “Ibil.”

⁸ EI2, s.v. “Djazirat al-'Arab.”

⁹ EI2, s.v. “Ibil.”

¹⁰ EI2, s.v. “Djazirat al-'Arab.”

¹¹ EI2, s.v. “Khayl.”

¹² EI2, s.v. “Djazirat al-'Arab.”

¹³ James E. Montgomery, *The Vagaries of the Qaṣīda: The Tradition and Practice of Early Arabic Poetry* (Cambridge: E.J.W. Gibb Memorial Trust, 1997), 116.

¹⁴ EI2, s.v. “Ghazāl.”

Unlike wild animals, insects enjoy a relatively high representation in the Qur'an, as out of the thirty earthly species that are mentioned in this scripture, nine belong to this class of animals. However, as is the case with other species, the insects represented are those that are well known to humans from daily life in Arabia, such as ants, flies, spiders, locusts, bees, and gnats.

Although some of the nonhuman animals that appear in pre-Islamic poetry are also encountered in the Qur'an, animal themes in the latter bear little similarity to those in the former. For example, in its treatment of the camel (which, judging by the number of times and the different ways it is referred to, is the second most important earthly animal in the Qur'an, preceded only by humans), the Qur'an discusses it in particular among the graces that God has bestowed on humans/Arabians and therefore stresses the practical usability of this animal species. When drawing attention to the camel itself, the Qur'an simply invites humans to ponder its creation without indulging in lengthy descriptions as one finds, for example, in Ṭarafa ibn al-'Abd's *mu'allaqa* in which dozens of verses are dedicated to the description of his she-camel and in numerous other poems. Furthermore, nonhuman animals are often given a symbolic function in pre-Islamic poetry. For example, Montgomery notices how "[i]n tribal or self-vaunting verse, the noble oryx is emblematic of the poet and his tribe."¹⁵ This does not mean that the oryx itself is not given close attention. The poems discussed by Montgomery show that the poet is very attentive to different aspects of the oryx's characteristics and behavior, however, what interests the poet most about this animal is the parallel between it and the poet himself or his tribe. Such symbolic treatment of nonhuman animals is not encountered in the Qur'an. On the other hand, animals as recipients of God's attention and graces and as signs of creation, which are important animal themes in the Qur'an, are not found in pre-Islamic poetry. Perhaps the only noteworthy similarity between the Qur'an and pre-Islamic poetry in their treatment of nonhuman animals is their usage in similes, however even in this case, the parallel is only partial. Whereas pre-Islamic poetry uses similes for artistic purposes, aiming at the exaggeration or embellishment of certain characteristics of the described animals, the Qur'an uses this literary technique to communicate certain human behaviors in a concise, yet vivid manner.¹⁶

¹⁵ Montgomery, *Vagaries*, 161.

¹⁶ For similes in pre-Islamic poetry, see Montgomery, *Vagaries*, 114; for similes in the Qur'an, see for example 74/al-Muddaththir: 50–1.

QUR'ANIC ANIMAL THEMES

A number of animal themes in the Qur'an lend themselves to interpretations implying humans' special status. The most important of these is the recurrent theme of *taskhīr* (usually translated as "subjugation") of certain animals and, more generally, of all creatures to humans. Furthermore, the Qur'an states that everything God has created is for humankind (2/al-Baqara: 29), which, at least on a surface level, seems to exhibit an anthropocentric outlook. Likewise, it unambiguously permits humans to hunt (certain) animals and to consume the meat of a certain number of animal species. It also allows humans to use some nonhuman animals in other ways, all of which point to these animals' servility to humans and presumably to their lower status. The phenomenon of *maskh*, the metamorphosis of some humans into certain nonhuman species as a means of punishment (2/al-Baqara: 65; 5/al-Mā'ida: 60; 7/al-A'raf: 166), can lead to the same conclusion. Because the process of being metamorphosed into a given species is considered a punishment, this seems to argue for the lower status of that species. Additionally, the Qur'an appears to portray certain animals (*an'ām*) as being somehow led astray (7/al-A'raf: 179; 25/al-Furqān: 44; 47/Muḥammad: 12). Although this feature does not place this animal category below the humans to whom they are compared, it still seems to impair the status of these animal species. Although on a surface level these themes may denote an anthropocentric outlook, upon scrutiny it becomes clear that they lend themselves to multiple interpretations, some of which are non-anthropocentric. Interpretations of these themes in a way that lifts the status of humans above that of the nonhuman animals in question are warranted; however, they only represent some among several other possible interpretations. In fact, in the light of the remaining Qur'anic animal themes, which clearly highlight the value of other animals and portray them as better than most humans, the interpretation of these themes in a manner that depreciates nonhuman animals becomes less plausible.

The importance of nonhuman animals and all beings beyond the human species in the Qur'an can be attested in different ways. In Alma Giese's opinion, "Es gibt wohl keine Heilige Schrift – ausgenommen vielleicht die Upanishaden und das Tao Te King – die so ausführlich über die Natur und ihre verschiedenen Erscheinungen spricht wie der Koran."¹⁷ In

¹⁷ Alma Giese, "Betrachtungen zur Seele der Tiere im islamischen Mittelalter," in *Die Seele der Tiere* (Wiesbaden : Harrassowitz, 2001), 112.

fact, if numbers have any significance, it is worth pointing out that, without counting the so-called rational species, 7 out of 114 suras in this text are titled after animals, including the longest one, al-Baqara (The Cow). To the number six,¹⁸ which is usually given for the suras titled after animals,¹⁹ a seventh can be added, which is al-ʿĀdiyāt, 100 (the galloping or running ones, i.e., horses or camels), as it refers to one of two nonhuman animal species. It should be noted, however, that both numbers are problematic in that they reflect modern/western meanings of the word *animal* (i.e., nonhuman animal), not what the Qur'an and medieval Arabic texts consider as animals. By applying the Qur'anic understanding, at least three more suras can be added to the number seven: 72/al-Jinn, 35/al-Malā'ika (Angels), and 76/al-Insān (The Human Being). Considering that the Qur'an refers to humans and angels in a variety of ways, this number becomes much larger.²⁰

In addition to nonhuman species, the Qur'anic word for animal (*dābba*) designates human beings, jinn, angels, and possibly other types of creatures who are not known to us. Etymologically, the root *d-b-b*, from which the word is derived, denotes the idea of movement, and a *dābba* is any being that can move intentionally. Although in extra-Qur'anic contexts the word *dābba* is often restricted to equine, the Qur'an seems to use it more often as a reference to all living beings that produce self-propulsion, including human beings and angels. This suggests that this scripture adheres to the etymological, rather than the conventional, meaning of this word. It is perhaps the same etymological consideration that explains why the word *ḥayawān*, which is the more common extra-Qur'anic word for animal in Arabic, occurs in the Qur'an with a different meaning: true life. Life extends to beings beyond the animal sphere and as such the word *ḥayawān* seems to lack the etymological precision found in the word *dābba*.

In the text itself a large number and a wide variety of animal species are discussed in several contexts.²¹ Animals, as much as the heavens, earth, and all other creatures, are presented as signs pointing to the existence of their Creator and to His infinite wisdom and benevolence. They are as much recipients of divine blessings and attention as any other

¹⁸ Suras number 2, 6, 16, 27, 29, and 105.

¹⁹ See for example Alma Giese, "Betrachtungen zur Seele der Tiere," 113; *EQ*, s.v. "Animal Life," (by Herbert Einsenstein).

²⁰ Sarra Tlili, "The Meaning of the Qur'anic Word 'dābba': 'Animals' or 'Nonhuman Animals'?" *Journal of Qur'anic Studies* 12 (2010): 167–87.

²¹ See the appended index of the animals mentioned in the Qur'an.

creatures. The cognitive capacities of the so-called nonrational species are presented as higher than one might expect because they, or at least some species or individuals among them, possess languages that allow them to communicate not only among themselves but occasionally with humans as well. The depictions of some nonhuman animals represent them as moral beings, capable of facing and making moral choices. According to many interpretations of the Qur'an, nonhuman animals will be resurrected. Even if their existence, unlike that of humans, is perhaps not everlasting, they will still receive compensation for undeserved suffering and retribution for the deeds they have performed in this life, which points to their accountability.

Whereas these themes suggest that nonhuman animals may stand on equal footing with humans, others go so far as to point to the superiority of the former to some, and in some respects, even to most of the latter. A nonhuman animal can be a teacher to a human being, as illustrated in the story of the raven that taught the son of Adam how to bury the dead (5/al-Mā'idā: 31). It can be the subject of a divine oath, as is the case with al-Ādiyāt (the running ones, i.e., horses or camels), a group by which God swears.²² Nonhuman animals can also be instruments of divine punishment inflicted on those who persist in their disobedience to God and his messengers, as illustrated by numerous instances. Assaulting a nonhuman animal can incur severe divine punishment, as illustrated by the story of the she-camel of the people of Thamūd (see, for example, 7/al-A'rāf: 77–8). More importantly, according to the Qur'an, all animals, with the exception of the vast majority of humans and jinn, glorify God. In this respect they become superior to most humans (who do not), according to the Qur'an.

In the next three chapters, I will explore the features and status of animals in the Qur'an. The third chapter will examine themes that can be interpreted as implying other animals' inferiority to humans. The first of these is the theme of servitude, involving both its abstract dimension consisting of the concepts of *tadhilil* and *taskhīr*, and its concrete one, involving the different ways whereby humans are allowed to avail themselves of certain nonhuman species. In this section I will also investigate the concept of *istikhlāf* (understood as vicegerency or acting on God's behalf), occasionally presented as an assignment or a mission that lifts the status of humans above that of other animal species. In the second

²² For more on this point, see Neal Robinson, *Discovering the Qur'an: A Contemporary Approach to a Veiled Text* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2003) 102.

section I will discuss the *maskh* (metamorphosis) phenomenon, and in the last section I will turn to the possible misguidance of *an'ām* (cattle). The fourth chapter will discuss the depiction of nonhuman animals in the Qur'an, highlighting the various features that this scripture ascribes to them. These features are language, rationality, spirituality, morality, resurrection, and inspiration. In the last chapter I explore human's status in the Qur'an.

Are They Inferior?

SUBJECTION AND SERVITUDE

Although a number of Qur'anic concepts could be interpreted as conveying humans' special status, there is no statement in this text akin to the biblical assertion of dominion as it is articulated in Genesis 1: 26 in which humans are designated specifically as rulers over nonhuman animals, or in Genesis 9: 2, where it is stated that the fear of humankind will be on all other animals. Instead, the Qur'an assures humans that everything in the heavens and on earth is *musakhkhar* (subjugated/serviceable – the prevalent meaning is not to be accepted indisputably) to them. Although the concept of *taskhīr* (verbal noun related to *musakhkhar*) is often taken as an indication of humans' privileged status and may be thought to share important facets with the concept of dominion, it still differs from the latter in at least two major respects. First, it does not define humans' position or role in the world exclusively or mainly vis-à-vis all other animals. Second, although the concept of *taskhīr* may involve the idea of control, sovereign authority remains in the hands of God and is *not* delegated to humans.

Perhaps what comes closest to the biblical idea of dominion in the Qur'an is the concept of *tadhīl* (subjugation), in which both elements of authority and servitude are more discernible than they are in the idea of *taskhīr*. Although this concept conveys the idea of serviceability in a clearer way, the reins of sovereign control are still in God's hands and not those of human beings. Furthermore, even though *tadhīl*, unlike *taskhīr*, is specifically mentioned in the context of human-nonhuman-animal relations, the Qur'an speaks of *tadhīl* in regard to only one animal category

and its relationship to humans, *an'ām*, the definition of which varies so much that it ranges from just one animal species to a number of species. Nonetheless, the concrete outcome of this concept is of paramount consequence to the animal species in question, as it allows humans to use them in a number of ways, thus pointing to these species' servility to humans, an idea which by human standards often implies inferiority. Furthermore, Masri seems to suggest that the concept of *istikhlāf*, according to which the human race, certain human communities, or certain individuals are supposedly appointed as vicegerents of God on earth, denotes the idea of dominion. Although Masri admits that this prerogative is strictly controlled, it is still worthwhile to see if this concept indeed entails dominion.¹ In the first section of this chapter, I first discuss the concept of *tadhil* and its related themes, consisting of the different ways humans are permitted to benefit from other animals; I then analyze the concept of *taskhīr*. In the second section, I discuss the concept of *istikhlāf*. In the third, I turn to the discussion of *maskh* (metamorphosis) theme. Finally, I deal with the theme of *an'ām's ḍalāl* or misguidedness.

Tadhil and related themes

The Qur'anic verses that most clearly suggest the servitude of *an'ām* to humans are as follows:

Have they not seen how We have created *for them (la-hum)* of Our handiwork the cattle (*an'ām*) so that they are their owners (*mālikūn*),

And have subdued them (*dhallalnāhā*) unto them, so that some of them they have for riding, some for food?

Benefits and drinks have they from them. Will they not then give thanks? (36/ Yāsīn: 71–3) (emphasis added).

A number of words in these verses point to the subordination and serviceability of *an'ām* to humans. In addition to the concept of *tadhil*, it is also stated that *an'ām* are created *for* humans (*la-hum*), that humans are their owners (*mālikūn*), and that humans can derive a number of benefits from these animals. According to the interpretations provided by three of our four exegetes, it is even possible to consider that these verses grant humans a type of control, seemingly close to the biblical notion of dominion, over this category of animals, because the word *mālikūn*, which

¹ Masri, *Animal Welfare in Islam*, 4.

usually conveys ownership, is taken by al-Ṭabarī,² al-Qurṭubī (Q15: 38), and ibn Kathīr (IK11: 382) to connote dominance and control. Al-Ṭabarī, for example, explains this word by saying “they [humans] manage them (*an'ām*) as they want by means of duress and control (*bi-al-qabr... wa-al-dabt*).” Both ibn Kathīr and al-Ṭabarī also quote Qatāda (d. 118/736), for whom *mālikūn* means *muṭīqūn*, that is, having the ability to manage them. Al-Rāzī, on the other hand, opts for the more common meaning of this concept, which is ownership. “If God created them (*an'ām*) and humans did not own them,” he explains, “then they [humans] would not have been able to benefit from them” (R26: 93).

However, in the same way that there is no consensus on what *mālikūn* means in these verses, there is also not much agreement on the meaning of *an'ām*. Because on more than one occasion the Qur'an speaks of the four pairs (*thamāniyat azwāj*) of *an'ām*, which are understood to consist of sheep, goats, cattle, and camels,³ the four exegetes' general understanding of the word usually reflects this definition; however, depending on the context, the meaning either can be restricted or expanded. In the interpretation of the verses quoted above, al-Ṭabarī states that *an'ām* are “the livestock (*māshīya*) which God has created for humankind and which He subdued to them. They are camels, cattle, and *ghanam* [sheep and goats].” However, al-Ṭabarī also cites another opinion stating that *an'ām* in the context of these verses “designates camels only, while cattle, although usually part of *an'ām*, are not intended in this verse” (Ṭ10: 462). Al-Qurṭubī also explains that *an'ām* technically consists of camels, cattle, sheep, and goats. However, in its most frequent usages, the word *an'ām* as well as its singular *na'am* designate camels only. Therefore, according to these definitions, the word *an'ām* refers either to camels only or to camels in addition to the other three livestock species. Two factors seem to restrict the meaning of this word in these verses to camels: firstly, the common (extra-Qur'anic) usage of the word to refer only to camels; secondly, the emphasis laid on the transportation function in these verses, which, of the four species mentioned by the exegetes, only camels are capable (and expected) of performing. Therefore, even if we decide that these verses grant humans dominion over them, as al-Ṭabarī, al-Qurṭubī, and ibn Kathīr seem to imply, the restriction of the meaning

² Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-bayān fī ta'wīl al-Qur'an* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1999), 10: 462. Henceforth citations from al-Ṭabarī's, al-Rāzī's, al-Qurṭubī's and ibn Kathīr's works of exegesis are given in-text, using author's initial, volume number and page number.

³ 6/al-An'ām: 143–4; 39/al-Zumar: 6.



FIGURE I. Camel (Ibil) from 'Ajā'ib al-makhlūqāt (Wonders of Creation) by al-Qazvini. Reproduced from Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.: Purchase, F1954.87. With permission.

of *an'ām* in these verses to one, or, at most, four species limits the scope of this assumed dominion considerably. It is not open-ended.

The way this supposed dominion translates in actual terms shows that indeed this prerogative has only an outward appearance of domination, for actual control is not in the hands of humans. To illustrate how *tadhilil* works, ibn Kathir explains that

Humans [have the ability to] subdue these animals while the latter *remain docile and do not resist them*, to the point that a small child would ride a camel, make it kneel down or stand up as he wishes, while the camel remains compliant. Such is the case even if the child were to lead a hundred camels or more. (IK11: 382, emphasis added)

Al-Qurṭubī also indicates that a “small child can lead, beat, and handle a huge camel the way he wishes, while the latter remains utterly obedient to him” (Q15: 38). Although al-Qurṭubī’s example suggests the use of coercion on the part of the child (by beating the camel), the aim is still to emphasize the amenability of the camel rather than the child’s right of coercion or power over the camel (hence the choice to illustrate this point through a small child, i.e., a relatively powerless human being, and a huge camel or a hundred camels, i.e., extremely powerful animals). The point, therefore, is neither that camels are stripped of all power, nor that humans are made more powerful to be able to control them, nor even that humans are given free rein to do whatever they like with them. It is rather that camels, despite their tremendous power, are made serviceable and amenable to humans. Although the end result may still be the same, as it allows humans to use these animals, the distinction made by the exegetes is important, as it indicates that actual power is in the hands of God, who has subdued camels, and not with human beings. Thus, what many of us today tend to consider as domestication – that is, humans’ effort of taming certain animals to derive services from them – is presented here as an ontological divine intervention that causes these animals to be willingly of service.

Al-Rāzī illustrates the same point in a different way. For him, these verses represent different steps in the way that God perfected his grace toward humans through the gift of *an'ām*. After creating these animals, He allowed humans to own them, because without this divine permission humans would not be able to benefit from them. The next step in perfecting this grace occurs by means of the *tadhilil* of these animals, for “an unruly and uncontrollable slave (*mamlūk*) is useless. Therefore, if humans owned *an'ām* and the latter remained noncompliant (*nādda*) and

rebellious (*ṣādda*) the grace would be incomplete, as humans would not be able to ride them” (R26: 93). In his opinion, however, the absence of *tadhliḥ* affects only the transportation function; eating such animals would still be possible, albeit only through the strenuous effort of hunting, as is the case with wild animals (R26: 93). As with the explanations of ibn Kathīr and al-Qurṭubī, al-Rāzī also highlights that God makes *anʿām* amenable to human control and not that humans are given an unrestricted right or power to control them through coercion or domination. The parallel that this exegete perceives between *tadhliḥ* on the one hand and taming and domestication on the other is also noteworthy, not only because it highlights the amenability of camels, but also because it indicates that, no matter how far one tries to push the limit of the concept of *tadhliḥ*, it still falls short of encompassing all nonhuman animals.

As elucidated in al-Rāzī’s discussion, one of the objectives of the *tadhliḥ* of *anʿām* for humans is to allow the latter to obtain certain benefits from the former. The verses cited earlier state that humans can ride, eat parts of, and more generally obtain benefits and drinks from this animal species or category. A number of other verses expound on these themes and spell out the different ways humans can derive benefits from different animals, including their own species. These benefits can be categorized into material, aesthetic, and religious.

Material benefits

And whereof you eat. The permissibility of eating the meat of certain species is indicated in the Qur’an in different ways, as signified by the verb *uḥilla* (to be made lawful), the imperative *kulū* (eat), and phrases such as “*wa-min-hā ta’kulūn/ya’kulūn*” (whereof you/they eat). The meat that is most frequently mentioned is that of *anʿām* and *bahimat al-anʿām*. Although the two designations are sometimes understood to be synonymous, the addition of the word *bahima* to the word *anʿām* raised questions for the commentators and in some cases led them to broaden this animal category. In some of the opinions cited by al-Ṭabarī, *bahimat al-anʿām* simply means *anʿām* (i.e., camels, cattle, sheep, and goats), whereas in others, the word *bahima* refers to the “fetuses of *anʿām* found in the wombs of their mothers upon being slaughtered,” the meat of which becomes permissible through the act of slaughtering the mother (hence not requiring to be slaughtered themselves). Al-Ṭabarī himself is inclined to understand the phrase *bahimat al-anʿām* as referring to the entire group of *anʿām*, including their fetuses, offspring, and

the adult animals. The meaning of the word *bahā'im* (pl. of *bahīma*) for him is simply "offspring" (*awlād*), yet it applies to the small as well as the adult animals of these species, because in the same way that the idea of *wilāda* (being born to a certain animal) remains operative once the animal grows to adulthood, the name *bahīma* also continues to be applicable. Therefore, for him the species designated by both phrases are still the same four, and the addition of the word *bahīma* to the word *an'ām* simply serves to emphasize the fact that the meat of these species is permissible at all stages of their lives, including the pre-birth stage. In a number of other opinions that he cites, however, the phrase *bahīmat al-an'ām* refers to wild animals (whose meat is permissible), such as deer, buffalos, and zebras, which broadens this category of animals (T4: 388–9).

Al-Qurṭubī and al-Rāzī add other explanations to the phrase *bahīmat al-an'ām*. Both of them state that the word *bahīma* may also be a reference to every quadruped, and that the reason they are given this name is because of the deficiency in their speech and understanding (*naqṣ nuṭqihā wa-fahmihā*) and their lack of discrimination (*'adam tamyizihā*) (Q6: 24).⁴ The word *an'ām*, on the other hand, refers to the four species. The reason they are given this name is because they walk softly (*līn mashyihā*). Adding the word *bahīma* to *an'ām*, al-Rāzī explains, may be understood as attributing the more general to the more specific. Al-Rāzī's point may be that this verse is simply saying "the quadrupeds which are *an'ām* are made lawful for you." If indeed this is his point, then *bahīmat al-an'ām* would still refer to the same four species. Nonetheless, al-Rāzī adds that, because wild grazing animals share certain similarities (such as rumination) with what are strictly known as *an'ām*, they can be included among them in this instance (Q6: 24–5; R11: 98–9). Therefore, according to these definitions, both phrases (*an'ām* and *bahīmat al-an'ām*) in their narrower sense refer to camels, cattle, sheep, and goats; whereas in their broader sense, they can be expanded to include all quadrupeds with the exception of the ones whose meat is not permissible, in particular carnivorous animals, donkeys, and mules.⁵

In addition to the meat of *an'ām*, the consumption of game (*ṣayd al-barr*) and fish (*ṣayd al-baḥr*) are explicitly pronounced as lawful in the Qur'an, although some restrictions apply in the case of game, which may

⁴ This opinion is based on the etymology of the word *bahīma*, implying darkness.

⁵ For a detailed discussion of Islamic dietary law see Michael Cook, "Early Islamic Dietary Law," *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam*, 7 (1986): 217–77.

not be hunted or consumed by someone who is performing pilgrimage.⁶ Moreover, the flesh of fowl is mentioned as a heavenly food with which the righteous are rewarded in the hereafter (56/al-Wāqī'a: 21), whereas quail (*al-salwā*) is mentioned along with manna as the food given to the Children of Israel during their exodus (2/al-Baqara: 57).

In addition to meat, the only other earthly edible animal product explicitly named in the Qur'an is milk (*laban*). By contrast, heavenly (animal?) products include honey, milk, and fowls' meat. Although on earth such items are produced by animals, it is not known whether in heaven they continue to be produced in the same way or that God creates them directly. However, considering the huge amounts of milk and honey in heaven (they run in rivers), one may be inclined to think that they are created directly. Among worldly foods, the four exegetes consider also that honey is alluded to by the word *sharāb* (drink) that comes out of the bellies of bees, but not explicitly named. In another view, however, the reason the Qur'an refers to what comes from the "bellies of bees" as *sharāb* (instead of honey) is because the first word has a wider meaning, because it includes honey, bee venom, royal jelly, beeswax, pollens, and propolis.⁷ Our exegetes also understand verses such as "[Many] benefits you have from them" (40/Ghāfir: 80) as referring, among other things, to other animal dietary products, especially dairy ones (Q15: 218).

Our four exegetes understand the command *kulū* (eat), specifically when occurring in the context of sacrificial meat (22/al-Ḥajj: 28), as conveying permission rather than obligation. Al-Rāzī, however, states that in the opinion of some people it is considered a "command of obligation" (*amr wujūb*).⁸ The advocates of this opinion maintain that the verse wants Muslims to deviate from pre-Islamic practices in which the well-to-do used to abstain from sacrificial meat out of disdain for the poor, to whom this meat was given. Al-Rāzī, however, does not agree with this opinion. This exegete also explains that the command to eat from *an'ām* does not convey restriction, for one can eat from many other species. The

⁶ "To hunt and to eat the fish of the sea is made lawful for you, a provision for you and for seafarers; but to hunt on land is forbidden you so long as you are on the pilgrimage" (5/al-Mā'ida: 96).

⁷ Muḥammad 'Alī al-Bambī, *Naḥl al-'asal fi al-Qur'an wa-al-ṭibb* (Cairo: Markaz al-Ahrām li-al-Tarjama wa-al-Nashr, 1987), 23.

⁸ This is one of the five *aḥkām* (judicial qualifications of actions in Islamic law). The other four are *mandūb* (recommended, meritorious); *mubāḥ* (indifferent, permissible); *makrūh* (reprehensible, disapproved of); and *mahzūr* (forbidden). See EI2, s.v. "Aḥkām," (by J. Schacht).

reason there is emphasis on *an'ām*, however, is because "they represent the main source of sustenance for people, while other animals, such as chicken, ducks, game and fish are of lesser importance in this respect" (R19: 181–2).

In his discussion of meat consumption, al-Rāzī makes a point of touching upon the question of pain inflicted on the killed animals. He first cites the opinion of non-Muslim as well as Muslim groups on the matter then provides the view of his own school.

The Dualists (Manicheans) say the slaughter of animals constitutes an infliction of pain (*ilām*) which is abhorrent (*qabīḥ*). This being the case, they maintain that it cannot be pleasing to God, as it conflicts with His attributes of Mercy and Wisdom. Therefore, [in their opinion] it is inconceivable that God could have permitted such an act. What further confirms this point [in their view] is that these animals cannot defend themselves and cannot talk to protest against the one who wants to hurt them. If infliction of pain in general is bad, they maintain, when it is done to the helpless and defenseless it becomes even worse.

Al-Rāzī then proceeds to the opinion of some Muslim groups. He says,

Know that Muslims differ widely on this question. The Karrāmīs claim that there is no evidence animals feel pain when they are slaughtered, as it is possible that God numbs their senses at that moment. Obviously, this is mere denial of facts. The Mu'tazilis argue that "the infliction of pain is not bad in an absolute sense." In their opinion, "it is bad only if it is neither preceded by an offense nor followed by compensation. Since God will give ample recompense to these animals for their loss of life and feeling of pain in the hereafter, they maintain that the act of killing them cannot be considered an injustice." Our colleagues, (*ashḥābunā*, i.e. Ash'āris), on the other hand, believe that the permission to kill these animals is part of God's administration of His Kingdom. The owner of a thing is entitled to do as he pleases with what he owns. (R11: 99)

Although al-Rāzī resigns himself to accepting this permissibility as simply an expression of God's freedom and omnipotence, his mere awareness of and reference to the issue is still noteworthy. What is particularly remarkable in his stance is that, unlike, for example, Aquinas, with whom he shares the same Hellenistic affinities, when al-Rāzī discusses the issue of pain, he does not justify the permissibility of killing other animals by human's superiority to them. Thus, whereas for Aquinas humans' superior status warrants that other animals be killed for their sake,⁹ al-Rāzī, who seems to be as convinced as Aquinas of humans' superiority to other species and who, like Aquinas, derives this conviction mainly from

⁹ Linzey, *Animal Theology*, 13.

Aristotelian ideology, does not seem to perceive a correlation between humans' status and the legitimacy of inflicting pain on other species.

And they bear your loads. The transportation function appears to the exegetes as the clearest illustration of the *tadhīl* principle. This is clear for instance in the example cited earlier, about the child riding or leading camels. Clearly, the amenability of such a large and seemingly unmanageable creature to a small child is perceived as a remarkable phenomenon, as if to say that this should not be taken for granted. If it were not for the fact that God made these animals serviceable to humans, such a thing would be inconceivable. Al-Rāzī's discussion makes the same point more explicitly, as he also believes that the absence of *tadhīl* affects the transportation function most of all, in that it would disappear altogether, whereas dietary benefits would continue to be available, albeit not as conveniently. In fact, al-Rāzī goes so far as to portray the act of riding *an'ām* as an awe-inspiring experience for someone who is willing to ponder it. He explains,

The animal which the human being rides is by definition much stronger than him/her. Furthermore, it has no mind to tell it that it should obey the human being. However, God, glory be to Him, created this beast (*bahima*) with certain outer and inner features which make it specifically designed to fit human needs. The outer feature consists of its shape, as being a quadruped makes its back fit for sitting. The inner feature, on the other hand, consists of its amenability to humans despite its tremendous power. The one who contemplates this state of affairs would be extremely amazed at [God's] omnipotence and infinite wisdom; that is why that person would feel compelled to say: "Glorified be He Who has subdued these unto us, and we were not capable [of subduing them ourselves]." (43/al-Zukhruf: 13; R27: 171)

According to the Qur'an, humans may use horses, mules, asses and *an'ām* to fulfill the function of transportation. However, in the case of *an'ām*, the four exegetes agree that from this category only camels are appointed for this function. In his interpretation of 16/al-Naḥl: 7, al-Qurṭubī says, "[God] here designated camels for this function. This is because sheep and goats are appointed for [the production of] meat and cows are appointed to plow the land."

The Qur'an presents the possibility of using *an'ām* and equine in their transportation capacity as a particularly vital grace from God and an expression of His compassion and mercy toward humankind. About *an'ām*, the Qur'an says, "And they bear your loads for you onto a land you could not reach save with great trouble to yourselves. Your Lord is



FIGURE 2. Horse (*faras*) from 'Aja'ib al-makhlūqat (Wonders of Creation) by al-Qazvini Reproduced from Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.: Purchase, F1954.84. With permission.

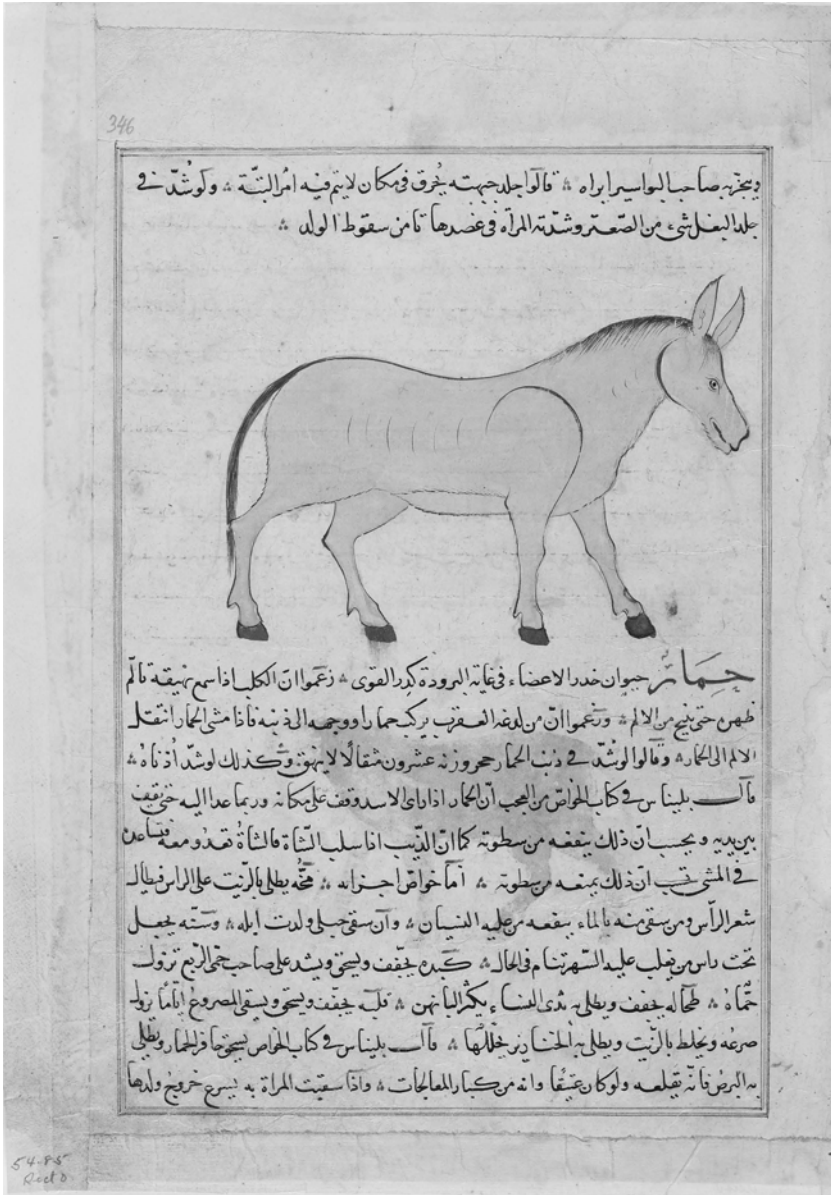


FIGURE 3. Donkey (*himār*) from 'Ajā'ib al-makhlūqāt (Wonders of Creation) by al-Qazvini. Reproduced from Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.: Purchase, F1954.85. With permission.

Full of Pity, Merciful” (16/al-Naḥl: 7). Al-Qurṭubī, whose primary goal in his *tafsīr* is to derive legal rulings from the Qur'an, finds evidence in this verse that humans may use beasts of burden for transportation purposes, nonetheless, he specifies that this has to be “within the limit of what they can bear. They should neither be overloaded nor rushed (*min ghayri isrāfin fi al-ḥamli ma'a al-rifqi fi al-sayr*)” (Q10: 49). He also cites a Prophetic ḥadīth stating, “if you travel at the time of abundance allow the camels to have their share from the land [i.e. to graze], but if you travel at the time of drought hasten to your destination.”¹⁰ Al-Qurṭubī also relates a story according to which the Prophet's companion Abū al-Dardā' (d. 32/652) is said to have owned a camel called Damūn, which he occasionally lent to others to help them carry their burdens. Whenever Abū al-Dardā' did this, however, he insisted on pointing out that his camel was capable of carrying only up to a certain weight and that those who borrowed it were not allowed to burden it with more than it could carry. On the day of the camel's death, Abū al-Dardā' is reported to have addressed it saying, “Damūn, do not call me into question in front of God, because I have never burdened you with more than you could bear.”¹¹ Al-Qurṭubī concludes from this story that these “beasts are dumb (*ujm*), they cannot look after their own affairs, and they cannot express their needs. The person who benefits from their services (*irtafaqa bi-marāfiqihā*) but still neglects their needs is ungrateful and has exposed himself to grievances and accusations before God.” He also reports a ḥadīth to the effect that 'Umar, the second caliph, was seen beating a man for overloading his camel, thus suggesting perhaps that, in addition to being morally wrong, mistreating animals of burden in violation of Islamic law is an act punishable in this world as well, and not only in the next (Q10: 49).¹²

Whence you derive warmth. According to the Qur'an, *an'ām* also are a source of warmth (*dif*) for humans, as it says, “And the cattle has He created, whence you have warmth (*dif*) and uses” (16/al-Naḥl: 5). By this, exegetes understand mostly actual warmth that one may obtain from the use of clothing, blankets, and similar items that can be made of the wool, hair, and fur of *an'ām* (T7: 559–60; R19: 181; Q10: 46–7; IK8: 291–3). However, it is also suggested that the word *dif* means the offspring of *an'ām*.

¹⁰ Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan Abi Dāwūd* (Cairo: Jam'iyyat al-Maknaz al-Islāmī, 2000), no. 2571.

¹¹ 'Abd Allāh ibn al-Mubārak al-Marwazī, *Kitāb al-zuhd wa-al-raqā'iq* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risāla, 1971), 414.

¹² Ibn Sa'd, *al-Tabaqāt al-kubrā* (Cairo: Matabat al-Khānī, 2001), 9: 126.

The hides of *an'ām* as described in the Qur'an provide convenience for humans in more than one respect. The Qur'an states that "God has given you in your houses an abode, and has given you [also], of the hides of cattle, houses which you find light [to carry] on the day of migration and on the day of pitching camp; and of their wool and their fur and their hair, caparison and comfort for a while" (16/al-Naḥl: 80).

In al-Qurṭubī's opinion, providing humans with houses in general (and not just tents that can be obtained from the hides of *an'ām*) is a particularly valuable favor from God, because "had He wanted, He could have created humans either in a perpetual state of movement, as is the case with celestial bodies, or in a perpetual state of immobility, as is the case with the land/earth. However, He chose to create them in both states and provided them with abodes where they can rest" (Q10: 100–1).

In addition to tents, humans can obtain from the hides, wool, hair, and fur of *an'ām* a number of items, summed up in the two terms *athāth* and *matā'*, which in the exegetes' opinions include clothing, blankets, rugs, and articles of decoration.

The type of hides that are usable according to Islamic law is another point raised in this respect. The points taken into consideration in this discussion are both the method used in the animal's death and the species whose hides can be used. Although there is no question about the permissibility of using the hides of *an'ām*, which are ritually slaughtered, Muslim scholars differ greatly on the purity (hence the usability) of hides obtained from carrion. The three main positions cited by al-Qurṭubī range between total permissibility and total prohibition, with a position in the middle making this usability contingent on tanning hides obtained from carrion, which results in their ritual purification. As for the second point, Muslim scholars differ also on the hides of the animals whose meat is not permissible, such as swine and carnivorous animals. Al-Qurṭubī, who cites different opinions on this question as well, concludes that the hides of any animal, the flesh of which is not permissible, cannot, by definition, be purified (hence should not be used) because ritual slaughter by definition cannot apply to them (*laysat al-dhakāt fī-hā dhakāt*). He also cites a tradition in which the Prophet is reported to have prohibited the use of silk, gold, and the furs of wild beasts (*mayāthir al-numūr*) (Q10: 103–4).¹³ Whereas other stipulations make silk and gold permissible for women, no prophetic stipulation does the same for fur.¹⁴

¹³ Al-Nasā'ī, *Sunan al-Nasā'ī* (Cairo: Jam'iyyat al-Maknaz al-Islāmi, 2000), no. 4272.

¹⁴ Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan*, no. 4059.

Aesthetic benefits: wherein is beauty for you

Referring to *an'ām*, the Qur'an also says, "And wherein is beauty for you, when you bring them home, and when you take them out to pasture" (16/al-Naḥl: 6). It also says, "And horses and mules and asses [has He created] that you may ride them, and for ornament" (16/al-Naḥl: 8), hence highlighting the aesthetic aspect of *an'ām* and equine. Before explaining how or why one would find beauty in these animals, al-Qurṭubī first tries to define the different types of beauty and how they affect the mind. He says,

Beauty is found in physical appearance (*al-ṣūra wa-tarkīb al-khilqa*), in inner morality and in deeds. Physical beauty is apprehended by sight and is harmoniously transmitted to the heart, which causes the soul to be attracted to it without understanding the functioning of this process ... The beauty of *an'ām* and equine belongs to this type. It is perceived by the eye and is agreeable to the soul. (Q10: 47–8)

In his understanding, therefore, this verse is referring to the physical beauty of *an'ām* and equine.

Part of the aesthetic effect comes from possessing a large number of them because it creates a favorable impression with other people who notice how wealthy so-and-so is. The four exegetes also agree that the reason why the phrase "you bring them home" precedes "take them out to pasture" in this verse is that the sight of these animals is more beautiful when they are brought back home because both their udders and their stomachs are fuller, and they look healthier, which fills the soul with happiness (Ṭ7: 561; R19: 182; Q10: 48; IK8: 292). Al-Rāzī adds one more reason for the reversal of the chronological order in the phrasing of this verse, saying that to have them all gathered in the same place and hear their voices is more enjoyable than when they leave the home in the morning and become scattered (R19: 182). Therefore, in the opinions of our exegetes, the pleasure that one experiences at seeing these animals results not only from their physical beauty, but also from the financial benefits and the social impact they may produce for their owners.

Al-Qurṭubī also maintains that although the aesthetic dimension of *an'ām* and equine is merely part of the pleasures of this world (hence in principle of short-lived value), it is still something that God has permitted. He relates a ḥadīth in which the Prophet is reported to have said, "Camels are [a source of] glory and eminence (*'izz*) for their owners, sheep are opulence for them, while blessings are tied to the forelocks of

horses until the Day of Judgment.”¹⁵ Al-Qurṭubī explains that the reason the Prophet links the entire idea of glory and eminence to camels is because they provide their owners with clothing, food, milk, transportation, and mobility in warfare, although they are not very efficient in attacks and defense. He links opulence to sheep because they provide their owners with clothing, food, drink, and great wealth because of their number, as they can breed up to three times a year. Unlike plantation owners and camel owners, sheep owners are taught humility and gentleness. Blessings are tied to the forelocks of horses forever because of the gains that one can obtain from them in making a living, the possibility of conquering the enemy, defeating disbelievers, and advancing God’s cause (Q10: 53). In al-Qurṭubī’s discussion, the aesthetic dimension of these animals is quite comprehensive, as it includes all the material, spiritual (such as humility), and religious (advancing God’s cause) benefits one may acquire from them. Al-Qurṭubī is evidently taking into consideration the agreeable psychological impact of all these benefits on the human soul.

Religious benefits

Another benefit which humans may derive from all creatures, including animals, is the religious one. In his interpretation of “He it is Who created for you all that is in the earth” (2/al-Baqara: 29), al-Rāzī concludes that the purpose for which God created everything for humans is that they “benefit from them in worldly matters as well as in matters of religion.” Al-Rāzī sums up the religious benefits in the intellectual processes of *istidlāl* and *i’tibār*, which are respectively demonstration or inference (of God’s attributes and metaphysical truths) and taking lessons (R2: 141–2). Al-Rāzī is referring here to one of the important Qur’anic themes of animals as signs of creation, which will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter. Like many other creatures, animals (human and nonhuman) are signs of creation in many ways, on which the Qur’an frequently invites humans to reflect, so that they can reach conclusions about the World of the Unseen (*‘ālam al-ghayb*) by deduction from such signs in the Visible World or World of Testimony/Witnessing (*‘ālam al-shahāda*).

However, even the worldly benefits that al-Rāzī cites are fundamentally religious because their ultimate purpose is also to make humans stronger in order that they perform their acts of devotion (*li-nataqawwā bihi ‘alā al-tā’āt*; R2: 141). In this way, al-Rāzī makes religious benefits

¹⁵ Ibn Māja, *Sunan ibn Māja* (Cairo: Jam’iyyat al-Maknaz al-Islāmī, 2000), no. 2393.

the ultimate goal that encompasses all other functions or benefits. In fact, in the other exegetes' views as well, the religious factor has so much weight that it may even turn other benefits into harmful aspects if the animals in question are not properly used or if they are not used for the main purpose for which they are created, that is, to help humans so that they can obey and worship God. An illustrative example is found in the oft-cited ḥadīth about the use of horses in which the Prophet is reported to have divided owners of horses into three categories, depending on how they use these animals. To the first category belongs someone who owns a horse for the sake of God, in which case anything the horse does, whether it is eating, drinking, galloping, or even dropping dung, would win the owner rewards in the hereafter. To the second category belongs someone who owns a horse to use it in personal matters so that he would not be in need of others, without forgetting God's right in it (which could be the payment of alms). When the benefits from the horse are for these worldly, yet permissible purposes, then the horse is a protection (*sitr*) for its owner. In other words, the benefits from such a horse belong to the category of permissible worldly benefits, which may be restricted to this life and do not necessarily extend to the next one. To the third category belongs someone who owns a horse to boast of it. For such a person the horse becomes a source of misdeeds (IK3: 30, Q4: 23).¹⁶

Thus, although the Qur'an emphasizes the worldly benefits that humans may derive particularly from *an'ām* and equine, according to these exegetes' discussions and a number of indications in the Qur'an, the ultimate purpose is not to highlight humans' special status. The point of this emphasis, as repeatedly stressed in the Qur'an and clearly underlined by our exegetes, is primarily to draw attention to God's grace and kindness. Furthermore, in exegetical discussions, putting *an'ām* at the service of humans is meant to help them perform their obligations toward God, not to pamper nor indulge them, nor to show their distinction. In fact, humans who fail to use *an'ām* and equine properly (i.e., in accordance with divine will), either by boasting about or mistreating them, run the risk of suffering the consequences of their misuse. By considering the two questions of (1) why God put *an'ām* and equine at the service of humans in actual life and (2) why/how the Qur'an discusses these animals' serviceability to humans, a theocentric outlook emerges: *an'ām* are put at the service of humans as a grace *from God* to be used in ways *prescribed by God* for purposes that are *pleasing to God*.

¹⁶ Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī* (Cairo: Jam'īyat al-Maknaz al-Islāmī, 2001), no. 2563.

Conclusion

So far, we have considered the nature and impact of the concept of *tadhlil* on the status and functions of nonhuman animals. One of the points the discussion has endeavored to make is that *tadhlil* does not mean that humans are provided with the means to control certain nonhuman animals nor that they are given free rein to do anything they may want with these species, but rather that as a grace from God, certain animals are rendered or made amenable and serviceable to humans in a number of ways. No actual authority is given to human beings in this respect. Thus, *tadhlil*, according to the earlier interpretations, does not correspond to the biblical notion of dominion, or at least to this notion as it has been presented by many biblical exegetes. Whereas in the Bible (or some discussions thereof) humans seem to stand somewhere between God and other animals (closer to other animals yet still having authority over them), in the Qur'an humans seem to be placed among other animals. They are as helpless as any other species. The only reason they can use *an'ām* (in a prescribed number of ways) is that God, who has dominion and authority over all creatures, chose to make these specific species amenable to humans.

The second point is that *tadhlil* applies to a very limited number of animal species, which are referred to as *an'ām*, typically defined as camels, cattle, sheep, and goats, but with the possibility of being restricted to camels only or expanded to include all quadrupeds whose flesh is permissible for food according to Islamic law. Therefore, the second element that limits the significance and impact of this principle is that it applies to a rather small number of nonhuman species.

Third, although the commentaries on the verses that establish *an'ām*'s and equine's serviceability to humans expound on the many ways humans may benefit from these species, they do not fail to show awareness of these animals' interests (e.g., al-Rāzī's discussion of the issue of pain) and to stress the need to protect their rights (al-Qurṭubī's reminder to treat animals of burden kindly).

Finally, the ultimate goal of *tadhlil* is not to emphasize humans' importance. In addition to being primarily a sign of God's compassion, it is also accompanied with various obligations. If humans fail to meet these obligations, either by mistreating the animals in question or by using them improperly, they incur punishment. This reveals an underlying theocentric worldview. The notion of *tadhlil* shares important features with that of *taskhīr*. Therefore, it will be treated further in the course of the following discussion of *taskhīr*.

Taskhīr

The other concept that denotes (or more accurately might be read as suggesting) “subjugation” in the Qur'an is that of *taskhīr*. Even though this concept appears in this text only in relation to (sacrificial) camels and/or cows (*budn*; 22/al-Ḥajj: 36–7) and camels in their transportation function (43/al-Zukhruf: 13), Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' still seem to take it as applying to the particular subjugation of nonhuman animals to humans.¹⁷ However, the Ikhwān's assumption is not totally unfounded, for although the Qur'an does not present *taskhīr* as a principle governing the relationship of human and nonhuman animals in particular, it still states that “God has made serviceable to you (*sakḥkḥara lakum*, i.e. humans) whatsoever is in the skies and whatsoever is in the earth” (31/Luqmān: 20). This very comprehensive nature of *taskhīr*, however, provides the mule – one of the representatives of nonhuman animal characters in the Ikhwān's epistle – with a refutation of the human claim of superiority and right of dominion over nonhuman animals. The mule contends, “God said *He subjected them to you* – just as *He subjected the sun and the moon ...* Are we to think, Majesty, that these heavenly bodies too are their slaves and chattels?”¹⁸

Although the mule's objection is founded on the Ikhwān's Neoplatonic worldview, in which heavenly bodies are considered superior to all sub-lunary beings, the point he makes is still valid. In addition to *budn* (sacrificial camels or cows) and *an'ām* (in this case camels only), the Qur'an speaks not only of the *taskhīr* of physical things to humans, such as the sun and the moon, but also of natural phenomena, such as the alternation of the day and the night. Obviously, this shows that deriving an open-ended hierarchical principle from this concept is rather incongruous, as humans typically do not define their status vis-à-vis such phenomena.

A look at the Qur'anic usages of the concept of *taskhīr*, in fact, raises questions not only about its meaning and implications, but also about its durability, beneficiaries, and ultimate objective. In other words, when the Qur'an says that everything in the skies and on earth is *musakḥkḥar* to humans, it does not necessarily mean that this is the case without interruption, nor is there evidence that the privileges of *taskhīr* and *tadhīl* are extended to humans only. Quite the opposite, in fact; many indications show that at least a number of other creatures partake in

¹⁷ Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', *The Case of the Animals*. 106.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

these privileges. Furthermore, when the Qur'an enumerates the number of things God *sakhhara* or *dhallala* to humans, such passages do not necessarily emphasize the latter's special status. Therefore, after exploring the meaning of *taskhīr*, I will investigate what the Qur'an says about these related themes.

Taskhīr in extra-Qur'anic sources

The entry of *s-kh-r* in the medieval dictionary *Lisān al-ʿarab* has two meanings attached to it, one of which is related to mockery, and the other, which concerns us, revolves around the ideas of subjugation and serviceability. The different meanings that ibn Manẓūr (d. 711/1311), the dictionary's compiler, provides for the verb in its second usage vary according to its nominal or verbal derivatives, the nature of the object (whether it is a human being, another animal, or an inanimate being), and whether or not it deals with the *taskhīr* of something or someone to something or someone else.¹⁹ The first and second forms of the verb, *sakhara* and *sakhhara*, mean to coerce (*qahara*) and to subdue (*dhallala*). The second form, along with the fifth, also means to assign work (to someone) without paying or compensating (him/her). Likewise, the noun *sukhra* refers to a nonhuman animal or a servant to which/whom one assigns work for no payment. In the conclusion to his discussion of this first usage, ibn Manẓūr says that “to *sakhhara* a being means to assign to that being something that she/he/it does not like to do, and every coerced and controlled being that cannot free itself from coercion is *musakhhar*.”²⁰ In this usage, then, *taskhīr* corresponds to the idea of subjugation. In addition, ibn Manẓūr defines the word *musakhhar* when it modifies the sun or the moon as “revolving in their orbits.” It may be that in his opinion this act involves the element of coercion because it is assumed that the movement of the celestial bodies is in compliance with God's command. The emphasis here is on the element of authority or control emanating from the practice of *taskhīr*, which apparently results in a hierarchical relationship, placing the active party that practices coercion above the passive one that undergoes it.

¹⁹ The verb *sakhhara* sometimes occurs with only one object (for example, God *sakhhara* something, which is usually translated as God *subdued* something), and sometimes with two objects (for example, God *sakhhara* something *to* someone, which is usually translated as God subjugated something to someone).

²⁰ Muḥammad ibn Mukarram ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʿarab* (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif), s.v. “s-kh-r.”

So far, however, ibn Manzūr has dealt only with the transitive meaning of the verb. When in addition to the direct object this verb has an indirect object that is governed by the preposition *li*, it takes on other meanings. In his reference to the Qur'anic verse "See you not how God has made serviceable unto you (*sakhhara lakum*) whatsoever is in the skies and whatsoever is in the earth?" (31/Luqmān: 20), ibn Manzūr quotes al-Zajjāj (d. 311/923), who says, "the *taskhīr* of 'whatsoever is in the skies' is about the *taskhīr* of the sun, the moon and stars to human beings, which means that they [human beings] can benefit from them in finding their ways and reaching their destinations. The *taskhīr* of 'whatsoever is in the earth' refers to the *taskhīr* of seas, rivers, animals and all the earth's benefits."²¹ "Saying about a ship that it *sakharat*," ibn Manzūr adds, "means it has proceeded smoothly in the sea, and that the one who *sakhhara* it is God." In conclusion to this part, he says, "whatever you find smooth, compliant and manageable in the way you desire has been *musakkhbar* to you."

Therefore, the concept of *taskhīr* consists of two components: authority and serviceability (or servitude), meaning that one party (regardless of who that party is) subjugates (or forces) another one to be of service to a third one. Whoever exercises that ultimate authority is the one who has meaningful superiority. In the Qur'an, of course, it is invariably God who exercises such authority. In ibn Manzūr's last discussion, however, emphasis is laid on the service component. In other words, this lexicographer highlights that the *taskhīr* of things to a certain party means that they are adapted or adjusted to fit its needs. Although the element of authority that results from *taskhīr* is still present, the emphasis here is on the element of benefit, malleability, and serviceability that the beneficiary can derive from and sense in the subjugated one who is the immediate source of the benefit. Clearly, the authority element is still the monopoly of the party who causes *taskhīr* to occur in the first place (God). In this regard, it may be argued that although the party that is being served or that finds the *musakkhbar* (subjugated or serviceable) thing malleable and fitting to its needs does not derive any status from the authority element, it still derives some status from the service element, first because it is the one that is actually served, and second because the whole process of *taskhīr* is there apparently for its sake. Although this may in some circumstances be a valid conclusion, this status is not as obvious as the

²¹ Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm ibn al-Sarī al-Zajjāj, *Ma'ānī al-Qur'an wa-īrābuh* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-Ilmiyya, 2007), 3: 361.

one resulting from the authority aspect found in *taskhīr* (regardless of who the *musakhkhar*/subjugator is). After all, in human society people often benefit or obtain services from peers or even from others who are superior to them in knowledge, social status, physical strength, and many other ways. In view of this, it is safe to conclude that it is mostly the element of authority that imparts superiority in the concept of *taskhīr*.

Our exegetes do not address all the questions raised (the nature, durability, applicability, and ultimate objective of *taskhīr*). On various occasions, in fact, they leave the concept of *taskhīr* untreated, as if its meaning is too obvious to require any analysis. For example, in his discussion of “and the clouds obedient between heaven and earth” (*wa-al-sahābi al-musakhkharī bayna al-samā’i wa-al-ard*, 2/al-Baqara: 164), where the concept of *taskhīr* is encountered for the first time in the Qur’an, al-Ṭabarī apparently judges that the word *sahāb* (clouds) is in more need of explanation than *musakhkhar*, hence offering an etymological analysis of the former yet not the latter (Ṭ2: 70). About the word *musakhkhar* in the same verse, al-Qurṭubī says that it means *mudhallal*, then adds “their (*al-sahāb*, i.e. clouds’) *taskhīr* consists of sending them from one place to the other. It is also said that their *taskhīr* consists of holding them up between heaven and earth without either pillars [to prop them] or straps [to suspend them]” (Q2: 134.). Therefore, even if al-Qurṭubī sheds some light on this word, he still fails to engage in a deep analysis of its meaning.

In contrast, al-Rāzī offers a more elaborate treatment of this concept. After defining *taskhīr* as *tadhīl*, he adds,

Clouds are said to be “*musakhkhar*” for a number of reasons. First, water is a heavy body, which, due to the laws of gravity, should fall down. It is against its nature to remain hanging up in the space. Therefore, there must be a Coercer (*Qāsir*) and a Subduer (*Qāhir*) who forces it to be in that state (i.e. hanging up in the space, almost against its nature). This is why it is called *musakhkhar*. The second reason is that if these clouds were permanently present they would cause great damage, as they would veil the sun’s light and there would be too much rain. On the other hand, their total disappearance would be equally detrimental as this would result in droughts. Therefore, the auspicious state consists of having clouds in specific measures (*taqdīruhu bi-al-miqdāri al-mā’lūm*). Clouds, then, are *musakhkhar* to God because He brings them about when there is need for them and holds them off when there is no need for them. The third is that clouds are not fixed in one place. Rather, God moves them around wherever He wants through the movement of winds. This is also what *taskhīr* is. (R4: 182)

According to this discussion, *taskhīr* consists in the clouds abiding by God’s rules or laws in terms of their state (hanging up in the space),

measurement (coming in the right amount at the right time), and movement. In other words, clouds are not behaving haphazardly, but according to strictly defined rules, which may be unknown to humans but which are fully defined and controlled by God. Furthermore, as a byproduct of this state (i.e., God's designing of clouds in this manner and clouds' conformity with God's plan), there is the element of welfare (*maṣlahā*), which God takes into consideration when He designs the state, measurement, and movement of clouds and which automatically ensues from the clouds abiding by God's decrees. The conclusions that are construable from this discussion are (1) that *taskhīr* consists primarily of the fact that God commands clouds to behave in a certain way, and that they behave in full compliance with God's decrees; and (2) that the way they behave has been designed to satisfy certain purposes and to result in certain benefits.

The understanding of *taskhīr* as meaning primarily to abide by God's decrees is encountered in the other exegetes' works as well. For example, in his interpretation of "and [God] has made the sun and the moon and the stars subservient (*musakhkharāt*) by His command" (7/al-A'rāf: 54), al-Ṭabarī says, "Your Lord is the One who created the heavens, the earth, the sun, the moon, and the stars. All of that by His decree. He commanded them and they obeyed His command" (Ṭ5: 514). Therefore, the *taskhīr* of these creatures in this case seems to consist in obeying God's command to bring them into existence. Ibn Kathīr says in his discussion of the same verse that "everything is under His coercion, subjugation, and will" (IK6: 320). The elements that these discussions highlight are God's full authority over His creatures and the creatures' absolute obedience to Him, whether at the time He brings them into existence or during their continued existence thereafter.

The second element, that is, the element of being designed in a certain way to satisfy certain purposes and lead to certain benefits, is present in a number of discussions as well. About the *taskhīr* of ships and rivers (14/Ibrāhīm: 32), ibn Kathīr writes "He 'subjugated' ships by causing them to float on the currents of sea waters, and 'subjugated' the sea to carry them" (IK8: 223). *Taskhīr* in this case consists of creating both the sea and the ship with certain properties so as to allow the floating and movement of ships in the sea. The emphasis here is rather on the adaptation of the sea and the ship to fulfill this purpose as well as the synchronization and concord between the two of them. Al-Rāzī explains this point in more concrete terms. He asks, "How could it be said that it is God who made ships serviceable (*sakhkharā*) to [us] when ships are manufactured

by humans?” To answer this question, he first cites the opinion of his own (Ash‘arī) school, which simply states that this is possible because God is the ultimate Creator of humans’ acts. Al-Rāzī, however, does not seem to be satisfied with this answer, as he supersedes it with the Mu‘tazili stand on this question. He says,

If God did not create trees, iron, and the various tools needed to manufacture ships; if He did not make known to people how to use all these items; if He did not create water as a running body which allows ships to move on it; if He did not create winds with their powerful movement; and if He did not widen and deepen rivers enough to allow the movement of ships in them; it would have been impossible to benefit from these ships. He is the Manager (*Mudabbir*) and Subjugator (*Musakbkhir*) of these matters. (R19: 10)

A similar analysis is offered in the context of the *taskhīr* of birds. The Qur’an says, “Have they not seen the birds obedient (*musakbkhārāt*) in mid-air? None holds them save God” (16/al-Nahl: 79). Al-Rāzī points out that God “created birds in a way which allows them to fly and created the space in a way which makes flying in it possible. To birds He gave wings which they can expand and contract, while He made the space penetrable due to its subtle constitution” (R20: 73). Then, both bird and space are created with certain properties so as to allow the act of flying to take place. The point these discussions highlight is that the concept of *taskhīr* implies, on the one hand, full obedience to God and total conformity to His decrees, and on the other, the adaptability of the things that are said to be *musakbkhār* to certain purposes. The first principle implies that the created beings have no choice but to be in the state in which God created them, implying God’s absolute authority; the second is that the state in which He created them is destined to satisfy certain (beneficial) purposes and a general sense of harmony, implying God’s wisdom and mercy.

Al-Qurṭubī is keener than the three other exegetes on emphasizing the element of benefits that can be reaped from *taskhīr* mainly by humans, but occasionally by other creatures as well. For example, in his discussion of “and compelled the sun and the moon to be of service” (13/al-Ra‘d: 2), he says, “[God] subdued (*dhallala*) them to benefit His creation and to serve the interests of His [human] subjects,” even if the idea of service, contrary to what the English translation may suggest, is not manifest in the original Arabic (the verb *sakbkhara* here is not accompanied by the preposition *li*). Nonetheless, Al-Qurṭubī adds that “every created being is subdued (*mudhallal*) to the Creator,” which not only highlights God’s omnipotence, but shows that humans as well are among the subdued beings (Q9: 184). About the subjugation of the sun and the moon

(31/Luqmān: 29), al-Qurṭubī says, “He subdued them by [forcing them] to rise and set in order to determine the appointed times (*taqdīran li-āl-ājāl*) and to acquire benefits” (Q14: 53). In al-Qurṭubī’s discussion even the *taskhīr* of birds in the open air (16/al-Naḥl: 79) may entail benefits for humans because these birds in their flying state serve as signs of God’s attributes (Q10: 100). Obviously, al-Qurṭubī’s insistence on highlighting the element of benefit for humans is not unjustified, as the Qur’an states on two occasions that everything God created is indeed *musakhkhār* (serviceable/adapted) to humans. Nonetheless, the Qur’an does not always highlight the point of serviceability the way al-Qurṭubī does.

The idea of coercion does not seem to be an essential component in the notion of *taskhīr*. When God orders or intends a certain being to do something, He is inevitably obeyed, however, it is doubtful that God’s commands are necessarily imposed by force or that this obedience conflicts with the will of the commanded party. Rather, a number of uses of the verb *sakhkhāra* indicate that God enacts His will in subtle and agreeable ways. In fact, this subtlety and agreeability are clear even in the cases when God “subjugates” human beings to one another, as reflected in many usages of the verb *sakhkhāra* in a variety of Arabic texts. For example, in his famous *hamziyya* (*hamza*-rhyming poem), the poet al-Būṣīrī (d. 696/1296) says in an allusion to the Prophet’s foster mother Ḥalima al-Sa’diyya,

When God leads someone to serve the blessed,
That person, herself, becomes blessed!

(*idhā sakhkhāra al-Ilāhu unāsan li-sa’idin, fa-innahumu’su’adā’u*)²²

Al-Būṣīrī here is alluding specifically to the fact that by overtaking the task of suckling Muḥammad during his infancy, everything in Ḥalima and her family’s lives changed toward the better. Most notably, they prospered financially in a way they had never witnessed or anticipated before. Thus, through a certain combination of events, God seems first to have subtly led Ḥalima to take up the responsibility of suckling the baby Muḥammad, thus putting her at his service.²³ Then, He followed this act by showering His blessings on her and her family. Although the poet uses the verb *sakhkhāra*, no attitude of coercion can be detected in this scene.

²² Muḥammad ibn Yūsuf al-Shāmī, *Subul al-hudā wa-al-rashād fī sirat khayr al-’ibād* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-’Ilmiyya, 1993), 1: 392.

²³ It was customary for prominent Meccan families to entrust their newborn children to foster mothers who live in the desert. Muḥammad, being an orphan, was not Ḥalima’s first choice. She decided to take him only when all other infants were taken. For more on Ḥalima al-Sa’diyya, see *EI* 2, s.v. “Ḥalima al-Sa’diyya” (by Montgomery Watt).

Al-Jāhīz also asserts that

None of God's creatures can meet all his needs without obtaining help from someone that has been made serviceable to him (*bi-ba'ḍi man sukhhira lahu*). Thus, someone can be of service to the remotest or most distant person. The most eminent person can be useful to the most unimportant one. Monarchs need boors and boors need monarchs; it is the same with the wealthy and the poor; the slave and the master.²⁴

Although al-Jāhīz proceeds to explain that the *taskhīr* of nonhuman creatures to humans is sometimes performed in less subtle ways, he still highlights that the *raison d'être* of *taskhīr* is the state of being in need. Thus, the mere fact that humans need service either from fellow humans or from other creatures is a sign of lack of self-sufficiency rather than superiority. Moreover, the examples he cites further illustrate the subtlety of *taskhīr*.

The poet and judge Zayn al-Din ibn al-Wardī (d. 749/1348 or 9) says in one of his poems:

Glory be to the One who has put at my service (*sakhhara li*)
 An envious person to give me fame,
 Why would I take offense at someone,
 Whose backbiting earns me acclaim?²⁵

These verses show even further how intricate the process of *taskhīr* can be. An act that is motivated by hatred may benefit the person it was intended to harm. In this case, according to the poet, God caused the "envious person" to be of service to the person whom he envies not through coercion, but rather through the ironical process of turning the outcome of his hatred (backbiting) into "fame." By considering these cases of *taskhīr*, this concept appears to imply subtle adaptation and adjustment rather than coercion. The idea of subjugation is perhaps still intended in the concept of *taskhīr*, however, its aim is to indicate that the subjugator is in full control over the thing she/he subjugates, and not necessarily that she/he exercises his/her authority in a coercive manner.

The concept of taskhīr in the Qur'an

Sakhhara and musakhhara. The notion of *taskhīr* occurs twenty-four times in the Qur'an, in twenty-three of which it occurs in the second form, either as a verb (*sakhhara*) or as a passive participle (*musakhhara*).²⁶ The

²⁴ Abū 'Uthmān 'Amr ibn Baḥr al-Jāhīz, *Kitāb al-ḥayawān* (Cairo: Mustafā al-Bābī, 1965), 1: 43–4.

²⁵ Muḥammad ibn Shākīr al-Kutubī, *Fawāṭ al-wafāyāt* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1974), 3: 159–60.

²⁶ This does not include all derivatives of the root s-kh-r, some of which are related to the idea of mockery.

agent of the verb *sakhhara* in the Qur'an is invariably God and never the human being. Likewise, when the idea of subjugation/adaptation occurs in the form of a passive participle (*musakhhhar/musakkhharāt*) modifying beings that are either subdued to God's command or made serviceable to humans, the exegetes agree that it is always God who subdues, subjugates, or makes them serviceable. Therefore, in these twenty-three instances God never delegates the authority component of *taskhīr* to any created being, which means that the element of superiority that emanates from this component is exclusively reserved for God.

Additionally, the verb *sakhhara* and the passive participle *musakhhhar* occur eight times in the Qur'an without being accompanied by an indirect object,²⁷ mostly when discussing the *taskhīr* of celestial bodies, once when discussing the *taskhīr* of clouds, and once when discussing the *taskhīr* of birds. This suggests that the element of service that can benefit humans is not part of the picture or at least that the emphasis is on the relationship between God and these creatures. Although in a number of these instances the consulted exegetes insist on seeing these instances of *taskhīr* usage as having a beneficial impact on humans (as is often the case with al-Qurṭubī), in many others, they state that *taskhīr* simply means the obedience of the creatures in question to God. Therefore, *taskhīr* can be a relationship between certain or most creatures and God independently from human beings. Being of service to humans can be a byproduct of *taskhīr*, however, it is not always portrayed as an essential dimension in this concept. Thus, even if one assumes that the element of serving humans relegates the serviceable creatures to an inferior status (which, as argued earlier, is not necessarily the case anyway), possessing a function that seems to have priority over this one, which is obedience to God, diminishes the significance of this servitude and consequently the status that results from it for those who benefit from it.

Sukhriyy. The only time a derivative of *sakhhara* (with the possible meaning of subjugation/serviceability)²⁸ occurs in the Qur'an in a form other than the second is in the *sura* entitled al-Zukhruf (Ornaments of Gold) where it is said,

We have apportioned among them their livelihood in the life of the world, and raised some of them above others in rank *that some of them may take labour from others* [literally: that some of them take others as *sukhriyy* (servants)];

²⁷ That is, without stating that a certain creature is *musakhhhar* to someone.

²⁸ Another possible meaning proposed for the word *sukhriyy* in this verse is mockery (Q16: 56).

and the mercy of your Lord is better than (the wealth) that they amass. (43/al-Zukhruf: 32)

A few observations can be made about this verse. First, this is the only verse where a *taskhīr*-related idea is present in the Qur'an without having God as its agent, or at least not in such a direct way as it is in all the other instances. Second, this is the only time this idea is encountered in an entirely human context and without involving nonhuman beings. Third, this is the only verse in the Qur'an where this idea is explicitly accompanied by the idea of status and hierarchy. In view of this, it is perhaps justified to conclude that at the level of inter-human relations, the Qur'an acknowledges (1) that humans have the possibility of subjugating one another and (2) that in the human context this type of subjugation may entail status and social hierarchy. The same is not said to be the case in humans' relations with other beings. In other words, the Qur'an never says that humans have the possibility of subjugating other beings; all they can do is to take service from other beings in ways that have been designed by God. Additionally, the Qur'an never brings up the concepts of status and hierarchy when discussing other beings' serviceability to humans.

It is important to point out, however, that even this inter-human subjugation is clearly different from God's subjugation of His creatures because this verse does not use the second form of this word (*sakhhkharalmusakhhkhar*), which gives the clear-cut image of someone fully in control over someone in a full state of obedience. Furthermore, although humans may derive some status from subjugating or taking service [in an authoritative manner?] from fellow humans and may take pride in this type of status, from a divine perspective this social hierarchy is meaningless. This Qur'anic stance is clear not only in the last sentence of this verse, which states that "the mercy of your Lord is better than [the wealth] that they amass," but also in the following verse, which goes so far as to say that "were it not that mankind would have become one community, We might well have appointed, for those who disbelieve in the Beneficent, roofs of silver for their houses and stairs [of silver] whereby to mount" (43/al-Zukhruf: 33). Al-Qurṭubī comments on this verse saying that, in the opinion of Muslim scholars, "[God] points in this verse to the worthlessness (*ḥaqāra*) and triviality (*qillat khaṭar*) of temporal things and possessions. Such possessions are so worthless for Him," al-Qurṭubī continues, "that, if it were not for the risk of encouraging people to disbelieve, He could have allowed the houses of all disbelievers to be made of gold and silver" (Q16: 56). Therefore, the status that the affluent may

derive from having possessions and servants does not entail any status with God and consequently is of no avail to them. In any case, whatever the significance of this type of *taskhīr*, it does not extend to humans' relations with other beings, including other animals.

Sakhhara versus dhallala. As we have already seen, the Qur'an uses the verb *sakhhara* or its derivatives to convey the idea of subjugation or serviceability of all creatures. However, when the subjugation of *an'ām* is discussed, it uses the verb *dhallala*. Although the two verbs are close in meaning and are sometimes considered synonyms, the verb *dhallala* connotes a stronger impact on its object than the verb *sakhhara*. As noticed in al-Rāzī's commentary on 36/Yāsīn: 73, wild animals are not considered *mudhallal* to humans, from which one can conclude that the verb *dhallala*, at least in al-Rāzī's understanding, involves the idea of domestication. The verb *dhallala* and some of its derivatives are also used in the Qur'an in relation to the land, which is made smooth for humans (67/al-Mulk: 15), "the ways" (*subul*) that are "dhulul" for bees (16/al-Naḥl: 69), and in relation to the fruits in heaven, which are made easy to pick (76/al-Insān: 14). Therefore, *dhallala* means also to make amenable and easy, and not merely serviceable. Both ideas (domestication and making amenable) are absent from the concept of *taskhīr*. Furthermore, in the Qur'anic context, something can be *musakhhar* to humans without having the natural course of its existence affected by this function. For example, celestial bodies, as explained in *Lisān al-'arab*, are *musakhhar* to humans in that they help travelers find their ways. Celestial bodies, just by revolving naturally in their orbits, provide this service to humans; they do not have to go out of their way to be of service to them. In the case of *dhallala*, however, the creature that is *mudhallal* has to do something extra in the process of being of service to humans. *An'ām* are particularly made amenable to humans (perhaps through domestication), and presumably the shape of the land has to be changed (smoothed) to be of service to humans. Therefore, although both verbs imply the idea of providing service, *dhallala* seems to involve also the element of servitude and not only serviceability. Therefore, the word that has more impact on other animals' status is *dhallala* and not *sakhhara*. As we have seen earlier, the only animal category that is *mudhallal* to humans according to the Qur'an is *an'ām*, a word which, when discussed in a *tadhīl* context, refers to camels only. It should be remembered also that just as in the case with *sakhhara*, the element of authority in the verb *dhallala* in its Qur'anic usage is also the monopoly of God. *An'ām* are made easy to use by humans, however, the one who presumably rendered them

predisposed for that and under whose control they continue to be is God, not humans.

Permanence of taskhīr and tadhīl

The other pertinent question in the discussion of *taskhīr* is whether the serviceability of all creatures to humans is a permanent state. In other words, when the Qur'an says that everything on earth and in the heavens is serviceable to humans, does it mean that they are so without interruption? None of the consulted exegetes provides an answer to this question, but one usage of the verb *sakhhara* in the Qur'an suggests the conclusion that *taskhīr* is temporary. So far, the meanings of *sakhhara* that have been discussed indicate the compliance of certain beings with God's decrees, and, when the verb is accompanied by the preposition *li*, something is made serviceable *to* someone. However, in one instance (remarkably, the last time the concept of *taskhīr* is encountered in the Qur'an), in the description of the punishment of the tribe of 'Ād, who disbelieved in the Judgment Day, the Qur'an says, "And as for 'Ād, they were destroyed by a fierce roaring wind, which He imposed on them for seven nights and eight days" (69/al-Hāqqa: 6–7), using the verb *sakhhara* accompanied with the preposition *'alā* (against) to communicate the idea of sending the wind against them. Therefore, the wind, which is among the phenomena that are usually made serviceable to humans, can in other circumstances cease to be of service and even work against humans in compliance with God's will.

Wind is not the only being that can be turned against humans. Nonhuman animals also sometimes become tools of punishment directed against certain human individuals or communities. In fact, the Qur'an tells us about a number of instances in which nonhuman animals served as instruments of punishment, or, to put it in other words, served as God's soldiers who fought against God's human enemies. In the following section I will discuss these punishment stories and consider their implications on the status of nonhuman animals.

Punishment stories. Perhaps the most famous of the Qur'anic punishment stories in which nonhuman animals were involved is that of the "Elephant," to which a whole sura, albeit one of the shortest, is dedicated. A similar intervention by a nonhuman animal in the course of human events is found in the story of "Nimrod," the details of which are related only in exegetical works. In these two stories, entire nonhuman animal herds attacked and completely destroyed entire human armies. Other animals

inflicted milder types of punishment on Pharaoh and his people before they were drowned. In this situation, different animals sequentially waged attacks against humans, after which they retreated without causing their total destruction. In another situation, one small animal was able to cause serious damage to a group of humans, the people of Sheba.

THE ELEPHANT AND THE FLYING CREATURES. The Qur'an says, "Have you not seen how your Lord dealt with the owners of the elephant? Did He not bring their stratagem to naught, And send against them swarms of flying creatures, Which pelted them with stones of baked clay, And made them like green crops devoured (by cattle)" (105/al-Fil: 1-5)?

The owners of the elephant, the exegetes tell us, are Abraha al-Ḥabashī, a ruler of Yemen, and his army, who attacked Mecca in the year of the Prophet Muḥammad's birth.²⁹ Abraha, we are told, built a magnificent cathedral in Yemen to which he decided to attract the pilgrims who usually go to the *Ka'ba* in Mecca. When the Arabs heard about his plan, one of them traveled to Yemen for the sole purpose of debasing the new church to convey to Abraha that it was not worthy of such an honor. This, naturally, infuriated the ruler, who in reaction went to Mecca with a huge army to destroy the *Ka'ba*. In Abraha's army there was at least one elephant, called Maḥmūd, which he planned to use in the destruction of the shrine. However, when they reached their target, someone whispered in the elephant's ear: "Maḥmūd, you are in God's sanctified city. Be wise and kneel down or go back whence you have come." The elephant immediately knelt down; no matter how hard they pushed, hit, and made it suffer, it refused to move toward the *Ka'ba*. Whenever they turned it in a different direction, however, it moved swiftly without any resistance. While Abraha and his men were still dealing with the elephant, an army of flying creatures that looked like birds came from the direction of the sea, each carrying three pebbles, one in the beak and one in each claw, which they threw on the soldiers. Anyone struck by a pebble, the exegetes tell us, either fell dead immediately or perished by partial disintegration of his body while running away from the scene of the battle. Abraha was among those whose bodies disintegrated gradually along the way back; eventually his chest split open, causing his demise. With the possible exception of two people who only lost their sight and/or became

²⁹ It is also suggested that this incident occurred 40 or 23 years before the birth of the Prophet. See Lawrence I. Conrad, "Abraha and Muḥammad: Some Observations A Propos of Chronology and Literary 'Topoi' in the Early Arabic Historical Tradition," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, University of London, 50, 2 (1987): 225-40.

paralyzed, no one in Abraha's army was saved. In one version, the casualties even included another elephant which, unlike the elephant Maḥmūd, obeyed its human masters and proceeded toward the Ka'ba to destroy it (Ṭ2: 697; R32: 91–2; Q20: 128–132; IK14: 455–9).

Opinions differ about the nature of the flying creatures. According to some, they looked like supernatural beings that may have been created for the specific purpose of fighting this war. Others maintain that they were regular birds, which were (or looked like) swallows or pigeons, just like the ones seen in Mecca (Ṭ12: 697–8; Q20: 134; IK14: 460–1). Whether natural or supernatural, all accounts agree that these birds waged a well-organized attack on Abraha and his army. It is reported that they arrived in Mecca on the eve of the attack. In the morning, armed with their pebbles, they were divided into troops, each under the leadership of a red bird (Q20: 132), hence displaying a commendable level of organization and discipline.

THE STORY OF NIMROD. Nimrod is not mentioned by name in the Qur'an, but rather alluded to in verse 2/al-Baqara: 258 as one who had an argument with Abraham about his Lord. A descendant of the Prophet Noah, the exegetes tell us, Nimrod was the king of Babylon and one of the four greatest kings who ever ruled on earth. However, his rule was characterized by tyranny. In fact, he was not only a mighty and tyrannical king, but was also the first ever to establish tyrannical rule on earth and the first human to claim divinity for himself, something that he continued to do even after Abraham was able to prove the fallacy of his claim (Ṭ3: 25–7; R7: 20; Q3: 184; IK2: 450–1). Three times God sent him an angel inviting him to embrace the true faith, yet to no avail. The third time Nimrod told the angel that he and God should face each other in a war. When Nimrod ventured forth with his army, God sent a huge army of mosquitoes against them, devouring the flesh and blood of his soldiers. Nimrod himself was saved from immediate death, however, one of the mosquitoes went inside his head through his nose and remained there eating his brain, so that the greatest favor one could do him was to hit his head with a hammer to alleviate his pain. This remained his condition until he died, either 40 days or 400 years later, depending on the exegetes' different accounts (Ṭ3: 27; Q3: 184; IK2: 452). As in the previous case, the punishment inflicted on this army was tremendously harsh and illustrates how, once God wills it, even small animals such as birds or even small insects can have the upper hand in dealing with humans. It is perhaps also significant that in both instances God chose armies of nonhuman earthly animals, when He could have chosen human or even angelic armies.

PHARAOH AND NONHUMAN ANIMALS. When Pharaoh and his people insisted on disbelieving in the message of the Prophet Moses and on mistreating the Israelites, the Qur'an tells us, God "let loose on them the flood (*tūfān*), locusts, lice, frogs, [and] blood" (7/al-A'raf: 133). In a version related by all four consulted exegetes, God punished Pharaoh and his people by sending down on them this pouring rain. Al-Rāzī writes,

The rain continued incessantly for a whole week, day and night from Saturday to Saturday, to the point that they could see neither the sun nor the moon. None of them could go out. Eventually they cried for help to Pharaoh, who asked Moses to lift the punishment, in return for which they would accept his message and let the Children of Israel leave Egypt with him. (R14: 177)

Moses did so, and not only did the rain stop, but also the abundance of water allowed them to have an excellent crop. When they saw that the flood was turned to their benefit, they changed their minds and broke their promise. So for a whole week, God sent another plague against them, the locusts, which ate up most of their crop. Once again, they asked Moses to pray for them, giving him the same promise. When the locusts left, they realized that the crops that were left were enough for them, leading them yet again to break their promise. So God sent against them *al-qummal*, which is either grain borers that ate up most of their crop, animal ticks that attacked them and their livestock, lice, or all three types of insects together. Like the previous plagues, this one was imposed on them for a whole week, and the insects were glued to their skin, hair, eyelids, and eyebrows and even entered their eyes. The same pattern, of resorting to Moses and then breaking the promise after the punishment was lifted, was repeated. The next plague was an attack waged by frogs, which invaded every inch of their dwellings, including their beds and their kitchens, and reached the point that, whenever they opened their mouths, frogs would jump in. One week later, after Moses had prayed to God to lift His punishment, the frogs departed. The last of these plagues consisted in the turning of all their water into blood so that they had no water to drink for a whole week (T9: 31–42; R14: 177; Q7: 171–2; IK6: 376–7). The punishments that the locusts, the small insects, and the frogs inflicted on Pharaoh and his people differ from the two previous ones in a significant way. These attacks involving animals are not as destructive as those waged against the owners of the elephant and on Nimrod and his army, hence presenting nonhuman animals as well-disciplined soldiers who comply with orders to retreat just as promptly as they do with orders to attack.

THE RODENT AND THE PEOPLE OF SHEBA. The Qur'an says:

There was indeed a sign for Sheba in their dwelling place: Two gardens on the right hand and the left (as who should say): Eat of the provision of your Lord and render thanks to Him. A fair land and an indulgent Lord! But they were froward, so We sent on them the flood of 'Iram, and in exchange for their two gardens gave them two gardens bearing bitter fruit, the tamarisk and here and there a lote-tree. (34/Saba': 15–6)

Both better and worse times for Sheba had something to do with nonhuman animals. The consulted exegetes explain that their land is described as fair (*ṭayyiba*) because of its abundance of fruits and the fact that they had no venomous animals, fleas, pests, or vermin (Ṭ10: 361; R25: 217; Q14: 182; IK11: 274). Al-Qurṭubī even says that, when “caravans that came to them had lice or other insects in their clothes, all these insects died as soon as the land of Sheba came into the travelers' sight” (Q14: 182). The people of Sheba were able to reach this level of prosperity mainly because of a dam, possibly built by the Queen of Sheba. Eventually, however, they became ungrateful to God, continuing to disbelieve in Him in spite of the large number of Prophets He sent to them (Ṭ10: 361; Q14: 182; IK11: 274). So God sent against them a mouse or a rat, which dug a hole in the dam so that, when the rain filled it with water, the puncture kept widening until the dam burst open, flooding the land and destroying its previous state of well-being (Ṭ10: 363; Q14: 183; IK11: 284).

THE PROPHET JONAH AND THE WHALE. Although our exegetes are convinced that these stories are instances of punishment, the same certainty is not felt in the case of the Jonah story. The Qur'an says,

Jonah verily was of those sent (to warn), When he fled unto the ship, And then drew lots and was of those rejected; And the fish swallowed him while he was blameworthy; And had he not been of those who glorify (God), He would have tarried in its belly till the day when they are raised. (37/al-Ṣaffāt: 139–45)

The consulted exegetes differ over the reason for Jonah's anger. Some of the opinions propose that he was angry with the people to whom he was sent because they insisted on rejecting his message. Another version states that he was angry with God, thinking that He let him down when he lifted the punishment from the people to whom Jonah was sent for no apparent reasons. In a third version, Jonah became angry because he was rushed into the mission for which he was chosen (Ṭ9: 73–5; R22: 184–5, Q11: 218–9; IK9: 434).

Jonah took a ship that was soon discovered to be overloaded, leading to the decision of disposing one of the passengers lest all of them be drowned. When they cast lots to decide who to dispose of, three times Jonah's name emerged as the one to be sacrificed. When he jumped out of the ship, instead of drowning in the sea Jonah was swallowed by a whale. The exegetes say that God inspired the whale neither to scratch Jonah's flesh, nor to break his bones, for its stomach was to serve only as his prison. When Jonah found himself in the whale's stomach, he initially thought he was dead, however, when he was able to move his limbs, he realized that such was not the case. The whale took him to the bottom of the sea, where he could hear sounds that he could not interpret until God informed him that they were glorification hymns (*tasbīḥ*) of sea animals. So Jonah immediately joined in, praising God and asking Him for forgiveness. The whale eventually cast him out of its stomach (T9: 77–8; Q10: 220; IK9: 434–6). Therefore, just as one sea animal served to inflict a punishment on him or to teach him a divine lesson, it is possible in a way to come to the conclusion that Jonah owed his salvation to other sea animals, which, through their glorification of God, inspired him to do the same, thus leading him to obtain God's forgiveness.

The exegetes are not certain that this incident represents a punishment for the Prophet Jonah. On the one hand, they relate a ḥadīth in which the Prophet is reported to have said that "Jonah praised God while he was inside the whale's stomach. When his praise reached the angels, they said: 'God, we hear a familiar voice coming from a strange land.' God answered them saying: 'That is my servant Jonah. He disobeyed me so I imprisoned him in a whale's stomach.' The angels wondered: 'Is it the good servant from whom good deeds are raised to You daily?' When God replied affirmatively, they interceded for him and God commanded the whale to release him on the seashore" (T9: 78; IK9: 436; Q15: 81). Therefore, this ḥadīth indicates that Jonah was indeed blameworthy and that the incident of the whale came about as consequence of his misdeed, which fact suggests a punishment. On the other hand, the exegetes are reluctant to admit that a prophet can really disobey God. Al-Qurṭubī considers the purpose of this incident to be only Jonah's purification (*tamḥīṣ*) from a small sin (Q11: 221), whereas al-Rāzī argues that anger, of which Jonah was accused, was for the sake of God (and not against God), and that he allowed himself to be angry because anger was not prohibited at his time. Nonetheless, al-Rāzī admits that this prophet should have been more patient and should have waited for God's permission before leaving the people to whom he was sent (R22: 186). So in al-Rāzī's opinion,

the small mistake did not consist of doing something wrong, but rather of opting for the less good deed despite the fact that he was capable of choosing the better one. At any rate, all exegetes agree that Jonah did not commit a grave sin.

These incidents show that the central component of the *taskhīr* concept is obedience to God rather than serviceability to humans. This is not to minimize the value of the serviceability component of this concept. *Taskhīr* is certainly presented as a grace from God toward humans. However, in view of the preceding discussion, it is perhaps safe to suggest that although the default situation is that everything is *musakhkhar* (serviceable / adapted to / actually or potentially beneficial) to humans, in some circumstances, when humans persist in their disobedience to God, *taskhīr* retains the aspect of obedience to God but not the serviceability component.

The scope of taskhīr and tadhīl

The Qur'an also says, "And your Lord inspired the bee, saying: Choose habitations in the hills and in the trees and in that which they thatch; Then eat of all fruits, and follow the ways of your Lord, made smooth (*dhulul*) [for you]" (16/al-Nahl: 68–9). The exegetes have two opinions about the function of the word *dhulul* in this verse. In al-Qurṭubī's view, the word *dhulul* in the sentence "*wa-'slukī subula rabbiki dhululā*" is considered an adverb modifying the bee itself. His point is that the bee has been commanded to be amenable or obedient to humans thus enabling them to move the beehives. Al-Qurṭubī considers that the bees are serviceable to humans just like *an'ām*, which God has made amenable (*dhallala*) to humans (Q10: 89).

The other opinion considers that the adverb *dhulul* modifies "the ways" which are made smooth to the bee. Ibn Kathīr considers this to be more fitting to the context of the verse and asserts that God has permitted "the bee to follow the paths that He made "*mudhallal*" (smooth) for it so that it can go wherever it wants in the midst of this huge atmosphere, the vast prairies, the valleys, and the high mountains" (IK8: 325). Mujāhid (d. 104/722), who is quoted here by al-Ṭabarī, says, "Bees find none of their paths arduous" (Ṭ7: 613).³⁰ Some of the opinions Al-Ṭabarī quotes are still inclined to understand the verses as referring to the serviceability of bees to humans, but he concludes his discussion saying, "However, we

³⁰ Abū al-Ḥajjāj Mujāhid ibn Jabr al-Makhzūmī, *Tafsīr Mujāhid* (Islamabad: Majma' al-Buḥūth al-Islāmiyya, 1970), 1: 349.

have chosen that the word *dhulul* is an attribute of the paths, because this is more fitting to the context” (T7: 614).

Al-Rāzī adds another interpretation to this verse. He says that it means “Eat from any fruit you like, and once you do that, follow the ways that God has inspired and made understandable to you in making honey” (R20: 58). Therefore, the ways here are not necessarily or only the physical paths that the bee takes in search for pollen but rather the abstract knowledge that God has taught to the bee involving the making of honey. About the function of the attribute *dhulul*, al-Rāzī cites both opinions, that is, that it modifies either the paths or the bee, without giving preference to either of them. Because he adds a new interpretation to the word path, however, it is also possible to deduce that not only physical ways may be amenable to the bee, but abstract or “mental” ones as well.

In his interpretation of “Have they not seen the birds above them spreading out their wings and closing them? Naught upholds them save the Beneficent. He is Seer of all things” (67/al-Mulk: 19), ibn Kathīr also states that the air is “subjugated” or “made serviceable” to birds out of God’s mercy and benevolence. About “He is Seer of all things” ibn Kathīr says that “He is Seer of all that benefits each of His creatures,” hence maintaining that all creatures, and not only humans, have a share in God’s attention and benevolence (IK14: 76). Al-Qurtūbī also notes that “in the same way that God made the earth smooth (*dhallala*) for humankind, He made the air smooth for birds” (Q18: 142). Therefore, although the Qur’an affirms that everything God created is *musakhkhar* to humans and presents “the rest of creation constantly [as] shaped around our human needs,”³¹ it does not mean everything is *musakhkhar* to humans only, nor that creation is shaped exclusively around human needs. If one accepts the opinion of these exegetes, at least some of God’s creation, the atmosphere, prairies, valleys, mountains, and abstract knowledge, are *musakhkhar* or *mudhallal* to other animal species, such as bees and birds. By analogy, it is plausible to infer from these discussions that God made serviceable to every animal the things it needs for its survival, such as the space where it moves. In fact, the mule in Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’s treatise goes so far as to state that “God created all creatures in the heavens and on earth and subjugated them / made them serviceable to one another,”³² thus not only presenting *taskhīr* as a privilege bestowed (perhaps equally) on all or many creatures, but also suggesting that even humans can be *musakhkhar* to other

³¹ Daniel Madigan, “Themes and Topics,” in *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur’an*, ed. Jane McAuliffe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 82.

³² Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’, *The Case of the Animals*, 106.

creatures. Obviously, this is not an unimaginable idea because humans usually (and according to Islamic jurisprudence are required to) look after the animals they own and provide them with a number of services, and in more indirect ways, they can be of service even to animals they do not own. An anecdote related in *Thimār al-qulūb* shows how a human being deemed to enjoy the highest status in human society can be of service to an ass. Abū Maṣṣūr al-Thaʿalibī (d. 429/1038) relates that

Abū al-Hudhayl [ibn al-ʿAllāf, d. 235/850] once visited [the Caliph] al-Maʿmūn [r.198–218/813–833] who invited him to share his meal. When the table was set and the two of them started eating, Abū al-Hudhayl said, “God would not be embarrassed of a rightful deed [meaning, “I have no reason to feel shy about a legitimate request”]. My servant and my ass are at the door!” Al-Maʿmūn answered, “you’re right,” and immediately ordered his chamberlain to attend to the needs of both of them. Because of this, when Muḥammad ibn al-Jahm [d. 277/890or1] encountered a difficulty, he used to say, “God, who has put al-Maʿmūn at the service of Abū al-Hudhayl’s ass (*sakbhkharā al-Maʿmūn li-ḥimār Abī al-Hudhayl*), can make this matter easy for us.”³³

Moreover, when the Qurʾan discusses the subjugation or serviceability of paths to bees, it uses a derivative of the word *dhallala*, which, as discussed earlier, implies service in a more tangible way and not of the passive serviceability or adaptation concept of *taskhīr*.

In the same way that *taskhīr* may be a privilege extended to many, probably to all God’s creatures, in the sense that they can be of service to one another directly or indirectly and knowingly or unknowingly, it is also possible to interpret the verse “He it is Who created for you all that is in the earth” (2/al-Baqara: 29) in a nonrestrictive way. This view in fact seems to be corroborated by another verse, stating, “And the earth has He spread out for all living beings” (55/al-Raḥmān: 10).³⁴ The word *anām*, translated here as “all living beings,” is often understood as a reference to all animals. Ibn ʿAbbās, reported by al-Ṭabarī, defines the word as “any creature that has a soul (*kull dhī rūḥ*)” (Ṭ11: 577). Al-Qurṭubī cites al-Ḍaḥḥāk in whose opinion this word means “any being that moves on the face of the earth” (Q17: 102). Al-Rāzī also seems to hold the opinion that the word *anām* refers to all animals. He says,

The word ‘*anām*’ includes human beings and other animals (*yajmaʿ al-insān wa-ghayrahu min al-ḥayawān*), for it does not have to be restricted to humans only. If, however, the word ‘*anām*’ is understood as a reference to human beings only,

³³ Abū al-Manṣūr b. Muḥammad al-Thaʿalibī al-Nisābūrī, *Thimār al-qulūb fī al-muḍāf wa-al-mansūb* (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1985), 365.

³⁴ Translation of Muhammad Asad.

it must be because humans benefit from earth more than other animals do, for humans can use things which are on the top of the earth and things [buried] inside it. If the 'anām' is understood as all animals, the point [of the verse] is to highlight the magnitude of the benefits. (R29: 82)

In view of the preceding discussion, it is justified to suggest that God has created the earth for all animals, not only for humans. This proposition may still be objected to on the ground that the Qur'an places more emphasis on humans in this respect. The reason for this, however, as I have noted a number of times, is that the Qur'an is a message addressed to humans. It is intended to draw humans' attention particularly to God's grace toward them in order for them to be thankful to Him. In view of this, occasional reference to what concerns other creatures suffices to remind humans of the fact that the message's focus on them (humans) does not need to be interpreted to mean that they, and only or mainly they, matter to God.

Goal of taskhīr

The mule in Ikhwān al-Ṣafā's treatise draws attention to another important point: The aim of the verses of the Qur'an that deal with the serviceability of anything to humans is to remind the latter of God's blessings and kindness to them.³⁵ This, indeed, is one of the points of these verses. The other two points are to invite humans to reflect on these themes as well as to show thankfulness for *taskhīr*. For example, the verse that establishes the serviceability of "whatsoever is in the skies and whatsoever is in the earth" to humans continues by stating that God "has loaded you [humans] with His favours both without and within" (31/Luqmān: 20). The point of this verse, then, is to highlight God's compassion and not humans' special status. Likewise, phrases such as "herein verily are signs for people who reflect (*inna fī dhālika la-āyātin li-qawmin yatafakkarūn*)" (45/al-Jāthiya: 13) or "herein indeed are signs for people who have sense (*inna fī dhālika la-āyātin li-qawmin ya'qilūn*)" (16/al-Naḥl: 12) accompany the theme of *taskhīr*, hence showing that an important goal of these verses is to encourage humans to reflect on God's favors and not simply to enjoy the fruits of *taskhīr*, keeping in mind that the two are not mutually exclusive and can be, and are in fact expected to be mutually supportive. A number of other verses stress the encouragement for thankfulness. For example, the Qur'an says, "And He it is Who has constrained the sea to be of service that you eat fresh meat from

³⁵ Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', *The Case of the Animals*, 106.

thence, and bring forth from thence ornaments which you wear. And you see the ships ploughing it that you [humankind] may seek of His bounty, and that haply you may give thanks” (16/al-Naḥl: 14).

In fact, the phrase “*la'allakum tashkurūn*” (that you may give thanks) occurs three times in the *taskhīr* verses and is implied in a number of other ones. In one of these, the Qur'an says,

God is He Who created the heavens and the earth, and causes water to descend from the sky, thereby producing fruits as food for you, and makes the ships to be of service unto you, that they may run upon the sea at His command, and has made of service unto you the rivers; And makes the sun and the moon, constant in their courses, to be of service unto you, and has made of service unto you the night and the day. And He gives you of all you ask of Him, and if you would count the bounty of God you cannot reckon it. Man is verily a wrong-doer, an ingrate. (14/Ibrāhīm: 32–4)

Therefore, by enumerating different blessings, these verses are again highlighting God's mercy and kindness to humans, not the importance or centrality of humans in the universe or vis-à-vis other beings. In fact, humans' depiction in these verses is clearly negative: “man is verily a wrong-doer (*ẓalūm*), an ingrate (*kaffār*),” they assert, using the intensive forms of these two adjectives. In view of this repeated failure to show thankfulness for *taskhīr* and other favors, it is perhaps not surprising that the last occurrence of the *taskhīr* concept in the Qur'an is with the preposition ‘*alā* (against) in which the *taskhīr* process is turned against a group of humans considered to be among the most ungrateful. One wonders if a tacit warning is implied here. If humans persist in showing ingratitude, the ultimate outcome may be to turn *taskhīr* against them.

In the exegetes' discussions, not only is the point of such verses to remind humans of God's favors and of the need to be thankful to Him, but also to remind them of their own limitations and of their constant need for Him. For example, in his discussion of the verses 43/al-Zukhruf: 12–3, ibn Kathīr says, “Without God's subjugation of [camels] to us we would not have been able to manage them” (IK12: 301). To illustrate humans' limitations even further, al-Qurṭubī relates that,

A group of travelers were in the habit of reciting “Glorified be He Who has subdued these to us, and we were not capable of subduing them” (43/al-Zukhruf: 13–4) whenever they mounted their camels. One of them, however, whose she-camel was so weak that it could hardly move, claimed that he could handle “this one” without God's help. No sooner had he uttered this sentence than the she-camel tossed him off its back, breaking his neck. (Q16: 45)

Thus, although the serviceability of a given creature to humans is clearly established in the Qur'an, its aim seems to remind humans of their limitations and to urge them to be humble and thankful to God rather than to make them feel superior to any other creatures.

Conclusion

Taskhīr, a theme that can be cited as one of the indications of humans' superiority to other beings in the Qur'an is about God's superiority to and dominion over His creation, rather than the superiority of humans. This is the case for a number of reasons. First, the elements that result in unquestionable superiority in this concept are that of control and authority, which are entirely reserved for God, as clearly indicated not only by the form in which the words *sakhhkhara* and *musakhhkhar* occur in the Qur'an (second form with God as its agent), but by other Qur'anic concepts as well, such as the concept of *mulk* (sovereignty) and *amr* (command), repeatedly said to belong to God alone. In fact, Wadad al-Qadi affirms that "[t]here is no ambiguity whatsoever in the Qur'an that all, full and absolute authority in the entire universe belongs to God and God alone."³⁶ Similarly, in her discussion of the origins of political authority in Islam, Patricia Crone notes that the fundamental assumption behind many of the [extra-Qur'anic] accounts she has investigated "is that all the power in the universe and all the physical and moral laws by which it is regulated reflect the same ultimate reality, God. God rules in the most literal sense of the word."³⁷ Looking at the same topic from a different angle, Rosalind Gwynne maintains that "[i]mpotence characterizes all entities in the Qur'an except God." She also asserts that "[p]eople and nations assume that their power is real; in fact, it is illusory."³⁸

Even in inter-human relations, in which the Qur'an states that it is possible for humans to take fellow humans as servants and slaves (*sukhriyy*), the Qur'an does not state that humans have the ability to "subjugate" one another, but rather "that some of them may take labour from others" (43/al-Zukhruf: 32). Al-Qadi notes also that "While the Qur'an presents God as empowering both individuals and groups to perform extraordinary acts ... such acts do not necessarily provide them with authority."³⁹ In the light of this, humans do not appear to be given real authority over

³⁶ *EQ*, s.v. "Authority," (by Wadad al-Qadi).

³⁷ Patricia Crone, *God's Rule: Government and Islam* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 6.

³⁸ *EQ*, s.v. "Impotence," (by Rosalind W. Gwynne).

³⁹ *EQ*, s.v. "Authority."

any animals, and, for that matter, over any being. What might sometimes appear like the possibility of humans' control of others is usually presented in the Qur'an as authority that is at once despotic and ephemeral. In the case of other animals, particularly *an'ām*, the Qur'an acknowledges that humans have the ability to afflict them with certain types of unnecessary suffering (4/al-Nisā': 119), but such acts are ultimately ascribed to the Devil and are clearly punishable.

The second component of the concept of *taskhīr* – the element of serviceability – is certainly presented in the Qur'an as a privilege, but there is no indication that this privilege is intended to be an illustration of humans' higher status, nor that it is an expression of their particular honor or worth. The serviceability of all beings to humans is meant to be an expression of God's compassion and mercy. Moreover, a number of indications show that humans are not the only beneficiaries of the *taskhīr* phenomenon. The fact that the Qur'an focuses on the *taskhīr* of things to humans does not necessarily mean that they are the only or primary beneficiaries of this phenomenon. The reason for the emphasis placed on humans could simply be that the Qur'an, being a message directed to them, frequently presents things from their standpoint or emphasizes what is relevant to their experience. Furthermore, the privilege of *taskhīr* is affected by its lack of permanence, as the Qur'an tells us of one instance in which a natural phenomenon that is usually of service to humans (the wind) becomes a tool that inflicts on a group of them a deadly punishment. Because the Qur'an informs us also of a number of instances in which nonhuman animals inflicted severe punishment on humans, it seems justified to infer that the latter's subjugation to humans is not unconditional or without limit.

Istikhlāf

In a section titled "Man's Dominion over Animals," Masri maintains that "Islam ... designates [man] as [God's] vicegerent (*Khalifah*) on earth,"⁴⁰ which indicates that in his opinion the Qur'anic concept of *istikhlāf* not only entails authority but also endows humans with the prerogative of ruling specifically over nonhuman animals. Although Masri asks the important question "Who is this man who has been appointed as God's representative on earth?" thus implying that this "exalted rank" is not

⁴⁰ Masri, *Animal Welfare in Islam*, 4.

conferred on humans unconditionally, it is still debatable whether the ideas of authority and representation are intended at all in this concept and indeed whether this is an "appointment" meant to confer on the supposed appointee any special status. Masri's understanding of the concept of *istikhlāf*, of course, is far from being an exception. Fritz Steppat notices that, by the end of the nineteenth century, "we discover that now the conception of man as God's deputy on earth has achieved general recognition."⁴¹ Therefore, it is worthwhile to investigate the history of this word to see if what it means to many of us today corresponds to what it meant to the early audience of the Qur'an.

The meaning of the word *khalifa* and its related forms has been the subject of much debate. The reason, as Montgomery Watt explains, is "that the root of *khalifa* has had a rich and varied semantic *development* in Arabic" and that this word "has so many facets that it is hard to know which is dominant in certain contexts."⁴² The ideas of authority and representation appear to have crept into this concept mainly because of the fact that this word became the title of the head of the Muslim state after the Prophet's death. Therefore, to acquire a better understanding of what this word means in the Qur'an, one has to take into consideration this political factor.

The definition that Edward Lane provides for the verb *khalafa*, from which the noun *khalifa* is derived, is "He came after, followed, succeeded, or remained after, another, or another that had perished or died."⁴³ In the Qur'anic context, Rudi Paret, who in al-Qadi's words, "hoped to come to some kind of 'neutral' but 'homogenous' understanding of what the term meant in the Qur'an in its various forms (nominal as well as verbal)," came to the conclusion that the idea of succeeding is the one that applies to this word in *all* of its Qur'anic usages. After having investigated all the occurrences of this and related concepts, Paret noticed first that in most cases this concept must be understood:

dans le sens que Dieu fait succomber les peuples ou les générations quand leur temps est achevé ou quand, par suite de leur comportement impie, ils ont perdu le droit à l'existence, et qu'ils les remplace par d'autres peuples ou générations.

⁴¹ Fritz Steppat, "God's Deputy: Materials on Islam's Image of Man," *Arabica* 36, 2 (1989): 166–9.

⁴² Montgomery Watt, *Islamic Political Thought* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1968), 32 (emphasis added).

⁴³ Edward Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon* (Edinburgh: Williams and Norgate, 1893), s.v., "*kb-l-f*."

Ceux-ci sont en conséquence les successeurs et les héritiers de ceux qui les ont précédés, mais en aucune façon leurs représentants.⁴⁴

In the remaining instances, where the “succeeded” or “replaced” party is not identified, Paret maintains that it can still be inferred.

There is no disagreement that the ideas of following, succeeding, or replacing constitute at least one important dimension in this concept in its Qur’anic context. As Paret explains, most of the Qur’anic usages make it clear that this, in fact, is its intended meaning. The question, therefore, is whether the ideas of succession and replacement are the only intended meanings of this word. Paret’s answer to this question is unequivocally in the affirmative, but two instances in the Qur’an appear to argue against this stance, as it is not known who or what is succeeded or replaced. In the first of these, God announces to the angels that He is “about to place a *khalīfa* in the earth” (2/al-Baqara: 30); in the second, God addresses the Prophet David telling him “We have set you as a *khalīfa* in the earth; therefore judge aright between mankind” (38/Ṣād: 27). The first of these is easily solved. Paret accepts a background story recounted by many exegetes, according to which Adam and his progeny are to replace the spiritual beings that used to inhabit the earth. In fact, a number of exegetes relate that jinn used to inhabit the earth, however, they spread corruption and shed blood in it, for which God sent against them an army of angels who killed many of them and chased the survivors to the distant parts of the planet. God then created Adam to replace them. As for the second instance, Paret maintains that the verse is telling David that he is to succeed and replace a former sovereign of the Children of Israel, probably Saul. Paret does not ignore the “judgment” part of the verse, which implies authority, and acknowledges that “David a naturellement exercé une autorité” but maintains that “son titre de *ḥalīfa* n’en énonce rien.”⁴⁵

Paret’s position is far from being universally held. Among the meanings al-Ṭabarī cites for the word *khalīfa* is someone “who governs in [the earth] among His creation by applying His decrees” (Ṭ1: 237), thus implying the idea of authority. Al-Rāzī and al-Qurṭubī also state that one of the reasons God calls Adam *khalīfa* is because he “represents (*yakbluf*) Him in ruling over the *mukallaḥīn* [i.e. those who are required to follow religious precepts]” (R2: 152; Q1: 182). Obviously, because in their

⁴⁴ Rudi Paret, “Significations coranique de ḥalīfa et d’autres dérivés de la racine ḥalafa,” *Sudia Islamica*, 31 (1970): 213.

⁴⁵ Paret, “Signification,” 215.

opinion Adam “*yakhluf*” God, the word cannot be rendered as “to succeed” or “to replace,” but rather as to “represent” or to “rule on behalf” of God. Among modern scholars, Patricia Crone and Martin Hinds also subscribe to the “representation” meaning, as they see a connection between the Qur’anic concept of *istikhlāf* and the political office of the caliphate.⁴⁶

Although Paret’s conclusion has been contested, the point he makes has considerable weight. In refutation of Paret’s argument, Crone and Hinds cite “the fact that there were exegetes who disagreed with [him].”⁴⁷ The disagreement of certain or even most exegetes with Paret, however, is hardly surprising considering that most of them were influenced by the political reality of *khilāfa*. Al-Qadi points out that “All these ‘standard’ commentators lived and wrote mainly *after* the formation of the Sunni creed; the earliest among them, Ṭabarī, participated himself in this process of its final formation.”⁴⁸ Therefore, it is to be expected that the discourse used to legitimize and validate the role of the caliphs by entrenching them in the divine scripture was gradually incorporated in various Islamic writings, particularly Qur’anic commentaries.

Watt, in fact, notices that “[t]here is some evidence to show that thirty years after Muḥammad’s death the Umayyad caliphs began to place a new interpretation on the word [*khalifa*] in order to exalt their office.”⁴⁹ Considering the scarcity of written sources from this period, this opinion may be difficult to defend. Nonetheless, in her study of the earliest works of Qur’anic exegesis, al-Qadi was able to find considerable material to corroborate this view. Al-Qadi discerned “five main meanings [early exegetes] thought the word ‘*khalifa*’ and related words possessed,” three of which revolve around the ideas of succession and replacement, one implying the idea of inhabiting and cultivating, and the last one denoting the idea of governing.⁵⁰ Al-Qadi notes, however, that the only exegete who truly subscribed to the last meaning (governing) is Sufyān al-Thawrī (d. 161/778), but al-Thawrī, she observes, “is one exegete, and a late one for that matter.” She concludes that the “two meanings which seem to have dominated the scene were ‘to succeed’ and to ‘replace.’”⁵¹ To the

⁴⁶ Patricia Crone and Martin Hinds, *God’s Caliph: Religious Authority in the First Centuries of Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 5.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁴⁸ Wadad al-Qadi, “The Term ‘*Khalifa*’ in Early Exegetical Literature,” *Die Welt des Islams*, 28 (1988): 394–5 (emphasis in the original).

⁴⁹ Watt, *Islamic Political Thought*, 33.

⁵⁰ Al-Qadi, “The Term *Khalifa*,” 398–405.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 406.

question “What is man’s distinguishing *function* as a ‘*khalīfa*,’” she maintains that those exegetes who attempted to provide an answer suggest “to cultivate” and “to rule.” In her opinion, however,

Since the first suggestion dates from the middle Umayyad period and the second from the late Umayyad one (or possibly from early Abbasid times), it can be well argued that these two chronologically successive meanings were the result of social change, with the ever increasing urbanization and complexity of Islamic societies. This proposition can be even further defended on the basis that the adherents to these two meanings essentially came from complex metropolises such as Baṣra and Kūfa.⁵²

Al-Qadi observes also that the proponents of these two meanings (cultivating and ruling) “had a serious problem,” as their “foundations were *philologically* unsound, for there is nothing in the language to suggest that *kh-l-f* meant ‘to cultivate’ or ‘to rule,’” hence being forced to base their conclusions on contextual elements only.⁵³

Steppat’s inquiry on the same topic led to similar results. His comparison of the interpretation of the term *khalīfa* in works situated at different intervals of Islamic history indicates that new shades of meaning crept into this concept. The earliest work he considered in this respect is that of al-Ṭabarī, who “sticks to his understanding of *ḥalīfa* as the succession of generations.”⁵⁴ Al-Bayḍāwī (d. 685/1286), who lived 400 years after al-Ṭabarī, as Steppat remarks, gives “‘deputy’ as well as ‘successor’ as the meaning of *ḥalīfa*.” It is worth noting here that al-Qurṭubī and al-Rāzī, who belong roughly to the same period as al-Bayḍāwī, have the same understanding of this word. Al-Bayḍāwī, however, as Steppat notices, makes sure to point out that the word *khalīfa* in the sense of representing God applies only to prophets “as mediators between God and ordinary men, so that Adam would obtain this rank, not as the first man, but as the first prophet.” In comparison with al-Bayḍāwī, al-Rāzī and al-Qurṭubī do not limit the representation function to prophets, however, both of them still clearly understand the role of *khalīfa* in a political sense. Al-Rāzī, as noted, considers that a *khalīfa* is someone who “represents [God] in ruling over those who are required to follow religious precepts (*mukallafīn*),” whereas al-Qurṭubī considers that verse 2/al-Baqara: 30 constitutes the scriptural foundation for the obligation to appoint a ruler who is to be obeyed” (Q1: 182–9). Steppat concludes from his observations that “it

⁵² Ibid., 407.

⁵³ Ibid., 407–8.

⁵⁴ Steppat, “God’s Deputy,” 165.

has now become permissible to discuss whether human beings can be regarded as God's deputies on earth, even if we still observe the tendency not to grant this rank to mankind as a whole, but to limit it to the Prophets."⁵⁵

Steppat observes that by the nineteenth century the tendency to consider humankind as a whole as God's deputies on earth had "achieved general recognition." Interpreting the concept of *istikhlāf* as something that singles out humankind with a special function can still be traced back to the medieval period. Steppat gives the example of al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), for whom "there was no question of limiting this rank [humans as God's deputies on earth] to the prophets." Steppat notes, however, that "al-Ghazālī's conception of man obviously was far ahead of that of the majority of orthodox scholars in his time."⁵⁶

The ideas of succession, replacement, and following are still discernible in the modern understanding of the *istikhlāf* concept. Nonetheless, Steppat observes that the "new interpretation [i.e., humankind's function as God's deputy] is given more weight." Among the modern Muslim thinkers who understand *istikhlāf* in this sense, Steppat cites Muḥammad 'Abduh (d. 1323/1905), Muḥammad Iqbāl (d. 1357/1938), Sayyid Quṭb (d. 1387/1967), and Abū al-'Alā' al-Mawdūdī (d. 1399/1979). In some discussions, the role with which humans are supposedly entrusted is quite momentous. Steppat cites Sayyid Quṭb's interpretation of 2/al-Baqara: 30 in which he states that

the Supreme Will (*al-irāda al-'ulyā*) has handed over the reins of the earth to man and given him free play; he has charged him with bringing out the intention of the Creator in the unfolding of the creation ... and given him the abilities needed for this task ... Thereby man has reached a mighty position in the order of being as a whole.⁵⁷

Clearly, then, by now the word *khalīfa* does not simply denote authority or governing in the name of God *among humans*, as many medieval exegetes maintain, but has become an expression of humans' unique position in the world. Steppat concludes that

It seems remarkable that in the course of time, and particularly in modern times, Muslims have widely turned towards a conception in which man is more than just God's object: a creature charged with certain divine functions and therefore resembling God in certain ways – God's deputy on earth. This is particularly

⁵⁵ Ibid., 165–6.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 166.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 169.

interesting as by establishing this conception a Koranic term has obviously been reinterpreted *against* its original meaning.⁵⁸

Paret, al-Qadi, and Steppat's conclusions provide substantial evidence that there is a discrepancy between the modern understanding of the term *khalifa* and what the word meant to the Qur'an's earliest audiences. Paret's theory that the word *khalifa* and its related forms in the Qur'an have homogenous and interconnected meanings that revolve around the idea of succession and replacement is not without validity, especially when one considers that etymologically the root of this concept does not imply representation. Al-Qadi's analysis shows how the idea of authority and representation probably became attached to the word *khalifa* as a result of the influence that the political office of *khilāfa* (caliphate) had on the Qur'anic concept of *istikhlāf* (succession/replacement). Steppat, on the other hand, points to new developments consisting first of the expansion of the scope of this word, as it became applicable to humanity as a whole or to large groups of humans, and second of its impact on the status of humans and their role not vis-à-vis fellow humans, but rather vis-à-vis other beings. Although both al-Qadi and Steppat admit that their investigations on this subject are not conclusive – in the case of al-Qadi because of the scarcity of material from the early period, whereas in the case of Steppat possibly for the opposite reason, that is, the abundance of material – their findings still have considerable weight. It is also worth noting that the part that is disputed in their conclusions is in fact whether the word *khalifa* denotes the idea of political authority and representation, that is, in a purely human context. The verse behind this difference of opinion is 38/Ṣād: 26, concerning David's designation as a *khalifa*. However, regardless of whether or not the idea of authority is implied in the word *khalifa* in this verse, David is still told to “judge aright between *humankind*” and not the entire earth with all its inhabitants. In the case of the verse 2/al-Baqara: 30, which is about the *istikhlāf* of Adam (and possibly his progeny), earlier exegetes understood it mostly to be about the succession of the human species to other (spiritual) species that used to inhabit the earth before them. Later exegetes added to it the element of authority and representation but limited that to the political sphere and a few individuals, who are prophets and rulers. When the word *khalifa* was occasionally understood as applying to the entire humanity, it was understood as *īmār* (cultivation; Ṭ1: 236–7). Therefore, the limit of the favor seen in this divine grace was to provide humans with a place where they

⁵⁸ Ibid., 172 (emphasis added).

could live and evolve. Clearly, there is a wide gap between the notion of *ʾimār* (cultivation) and “hand[ing] over the reins of the earth to man and giv[ing] him free play,” as maintained by Sayyid Quṭb.

It is also important to point out that many of the themes occurring in the *istikhlāf* verses disprove the claim that this concept imparts any significant status to humans. In the case of 2/al-Baqara: 30, it is noticeable that, as soon as God announces to the angels that He is about to have a *khalīfa* on earth, they express their surprise that God has opted for a being that will bring corruption to the earth and shed blood. Although God indirectly communicates to them that there is wisdom in creating Adam and his progeny, the mere fact that God reports the angels' skepticism and the tacit acknowledgement that their opinion about humans is not unjustified is perhaps meant to balance the overall picture by pointing both to the positive and negative aspects of humankind.

In the case of other verses that express this idea, particularly when God causes a new nation or community to replace a former one, He tells the succeeding nation (1) that this replacement is a grace from Him (7/al-A'raf: 69, 74); (2) that the succeeding party needs to show gratitude and thankfulness (7/al-A'raf: 69, 74); (3) that the succeeding party needs to abide by God's commands (7/al-A'raf: 74); (4) that the purpose of this *istikhlāf* is to test the replacing party (7/al-A'raf: 129; 10/Yūnus: 14); and (5) that if the successors fail to obey God and to show thankfulness, they will be replaced by yet another party (11/Hūd: 57). In fact, the idea that no one is above being replaced is clearly expressed in the Qur'an. Even believers are reminded of the fact that “Whoso of you becomes a renegade from his religion, [know that in his stead] God will bring a people whom He loves and who love Him” (5/al-Mā'ida: 54).

CONCLUSION

It is widely accepted in modern scholarship that the Qur'anic notion of *khalīfa* implies that humans are specifically entrusted to rule on behalf of God over the natural world. This opinion is hardly defensible. First, considerable textual and contextual evidence suggests that the ideas of representation and authority crept into this word's meaning at a post-revelation time, as a result of the influence of the political institution of the caliphate. Second, one of the verses that may give us reason to consider that the idea of authority may be implied in this Qur'anic word (the David verse) brings up authority in a purely human context. The “Adam” verse does not bring up the idea of authority, although this idea

was sometimes read into it. In general, however, early exegetes understood the word *khalifa* as denoting the succession of Adam and his progeny to the former inhabitants of the earth (jinn); and at a later stage, the word *khalifa* was interpreted as “vicegerent,” however, even in this case this representation was mostly perceived in a purely human context. Although the idea that humankind at large was entrusted with a representational role vis-à-vis the natural world was occasionally encountered in medieval works (notably, in the works of scholars who were steeped in Neoplatonic views, such as al-Ghazālī and Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’), this idea became prevalent only in the modern era. It is also important to point out that etymologically the root *kh-l-f* does not denote the ideas of representation and authority. Finally, although the Qur’an presents *istikhlāf* as a favor from God, like *taskhīr*, its point is to highlight God’s compassion and not human’s special status.

Maskh (metamorphosis)

Apart from servility, the inferiority of nonhuman animal species to humans might perhaps also be inferred from the theme of *maskh*, which consists of the metamorphosis of humans into certain animals as a way of punishing them. According to the Qur’an, a group of Israelites who broke the Sabbath were punished with *maskh*; God turned them into apes and swine (2/al-Baqara: 65; 5/al-Mā’ida: 60; and 7/al-A’raf: 163–6).⁵⁹ The exegetes report that in the opinion of Mujāhid this metamorphosis is not literal because in his understanding God metamorphosed their hearts by sealing them and did not turn the humans into actual nonhuman animals (IK1: 436; T1: 373; R3: 103). No justification for this opinion is reported from Mujāhid, but al-Rāzī cites two possible reasons behind it: the logical impossibility of the phenomenon of *maskh*, and the fact that if *maskh* truly existed, then it would have led to social confusion, for one would not be able to differentiate between real and metamorphic nonhuman animals. Al-Rāzī cites these reasons, however, only to refute them.

The story, as narrated in detail in the four exegetical works considered here, tells us that the Israelites preferred to take Saturday as their holiday instead of Friday. God granted them this, but in return He forbade them from doing any type of work during the Sabbath. To make the test even harder, in a town located on the seashore, fish started coming into view abundantly on the Sabbath but not during the rest of the week, so

⁵⁹ Michael Cook, “Ibn Qutayba and the Monkeys,” *Studia Islamica*, 89 (1999).

that many people among them started craving the fish. Eventually, one of them caught a fish and either attached it to a peg or left it in a basin close to the shore (depending on the version) with a view to taking it on the following day. Seeing that no divine punishment was inflicted on him, many others started imitating him. Many others however continued to abide by the divine order and even admonished the violators of the Sabbath, yet to no avail. When the righteous became certain that their efforts were in vain, they built a wall to separate themselves from the wrongdoers. One day, they awoke to find that the elderly dwellers of the opposite side of the wall had been turned into swine and the younger into apes. When the human members reminded their metamorphic relatives of their disobedience, the latter nodded, acknowledging their sins. The four exegetes also agree that the metamorphic apes neither ate nor drank and that they died within three days of their transformation, leaving behind no progeny of their kind (IK6: 426).⁶⁰

The reason why this metamorphosis was efficient as a punishment, one might think, is that it was the equivalent of a demotion or a downgrading of these humans by turning them into creatures below the human level. In fact, ibn Kathīr's analysis reflects this idea. He says that God turned the violators of the Sabbath specifically into apes because "The shape of apes is the closest to the shape of humans in appearance, yet apes are not really humans. Likewise, the deeds of this group of people seemed to be right, but they were truly wrong, so their punishment had to correspond to their deeds" (IK1: 436).

Therefore, the parallel that is noticed in ibn Kathīr's analogy is between good deeds and humans on the one hand and false deeds and apes on the other. In other words, it is as if apes are a failed imitation of humans, and this is why their shape became fit for those whose deeds failed to measure up to what is expected of righteous human beings.

Al-Rāzī, however, goes into more depth in his discussion of the phenomenon of *maskh* and proposes a psychological analysis in which *maskh* is not seen as demotion. He firstly responds to the opinion that does not accept the literal metamorphosis, and secondly provides an analysis of how this metamorphosis represents a punishment. The opinion that is in favor of the figurative interpretation, al-Rāzī explains, is based on two arguments. First, it contends that the human being consists of a given

⁶⁰ This narrative (transforming sinners into apes) is part of rabbinic literature as well. For more on this point, see Louis Ginzber, *The Legend of the Jews* [translated from German by Henrietta Szold] (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1912), 180.

physical bodily structure, and therefore, if God abolishes this structure and transforms the human shape into that of an ape, then this is considered an annihilation of the human being followed by the creation of a different creature instead of him/her. Consequently, literal metamorphosis cannot really exist because all that can happen is the elimination of one creature and its replacement by another. Second, if we grant that this metamorphosis was literal, then how do we guarantee that what looked like dogs or apes were not rational human beings? (R3: 103).

In answer to the first objection, al-Rāzī says that,

The human being does not consist of a given bodily structure, since this structure keeps changing, as when someone gains or loses weight. However, even if the parts in the human body change, the person himself remains the same. The human being is something (*amr*) beyond the tangible bodily structure, and this 'thing' is either a body (*jism*) permeating the [human] body (*sāriyan fī al-badan*) or a part (*juz'*) in some organs of the body, such as the heart or the brain, or it can also be an abstract existent (*mawjūd mujarrad*), as proposed by the *falāsifa*. In any case, we know that it is not impossible for an angel who is immensely larger than the Prophet's room to go inside it. (R3: 103)

Al-Rāzī's point is that no matter to what degree a body may change, the identity of a creature can still be the same. As for the second contention, he says that the assurance that the nonhuman animals we see are not metamorphic creatures comes from the consensus of the Muslim community (*umma*) about this matter. Al-Rāzī concludes that "Since we have established that metamorphosis per se is not impossible, then it is possible to understand the verses discussing it in a literal sense, although the figurative interpretation proposed by Mujāhid is not farfetched, since traditionally people do call an obstinate person an ass or an ape" (R3: 103).

Al-Rāzī then moves on to explain how literal metamorphosis works as a punishment. In his opinion, the question to be asked here is how the metamorphic apes would feel any pain because after becoming apes they would have no intelligence and no understanding and would be unaware of what had happened to them. Evidently, being an ape in itself, al-Rāzī asserts, is not a painful state because when apes are healthy, they are not in pain merely by virtue of being apes. In response to this question al-Rāzī asks,

Why is it not possible to say that the essence of humanity, the element that allows the human being to have discernment and makes him rational, is still there, but when the bodily structure changes the metamorphic apes are not capable of speaking or of performing human acts? Therefore they would realize that what

has happened to them is a result of their awful disobedience and as a consequence they would feel utter fear and disgrace. They might also feel physical pain because of the dramatic change in their organs. The fact that real apes are comfortable with their own forms does not mean that the metamorphic ones should be as comfortable. Their acquired forms are strange and accidental to them, and consequently, these forms may cause them to suffer. (R3: 103)

Despite al-Rāzī's firm belief in the superiority of humans to other animals, he does not establish his analysis of the metamorphosis phenomenon and the way it translates into a form of punishment on the principle of hierarchy. He mainly postulates that if metamorphosis is to work as a tool of punishment, it has to involve pain and suffering. For him, the lack of intelligence and discernment, which he attributes to apes and which he certainly takes as a sign of their inferiority, is the very factor that would nullify the effect of metamorphosis if it is meant to inflict pain. Therefore, the point of metamorphosis must be something other than the downgrading of humans. Al-Rāzī suggests that one of the elements that may have caused the metamorphic apes to feel pain is that the change they underwent was limited to their bodies and did not extend to their souls. Therefore, what caused them to suffer was the tension resulting from the confinement of their human (rational) souls in bodies that were not originally theirs, bodies that he describes as "strange and accidental" to them. In al-Rāzī's opinion, this incompatibility between the souls and bodies may have led not only to psychological trauma but also to physical pain that, being the result of finding themselves in bodies that are not originally theirs, is particular to them and not shared by non-metamorphic apes. If one accepts al-Rāzī's analysis, then the transformation of these creatures into apes is not the core of their tragedy. Rather, the core of their tragedy is that they remained halfway between the human and the ape states. Had they been transformed fully into apes, their feeling of pain would have been as nonexistent as when they were fully human.

By attributing the efficiency of *maskh* to the tension between the bodies and the souls of the metamorphic apes, al-Rāzī not only offers a more philosophically grounded explanation for this phenomenon, but also presents us with an interpretation that is less detrimental to the status of apes than the figurative one. In the figurative interpretation proposed by Mujāhid, the point of *maskh* is to insult these humans by comparing them to nonhuman animal species, which presumes that other animals, or at least swine and apes, are lower than humans in status. Furthermore, al-Rāzī's theory is not without foundation. The description of the

metamorphic apes' behavior in exegetical treatments indicates that they still understood human language and that they recognized their fellows among humans, which shows that they were still capable of "discernment" and that they could relate to the human experience. However, they were deprived of the main means of communication they were used to, which is speech, as the only means of communication that was still available for them was the nonverbal one, a situation that could have been frustrating and painful to them.

Therefore, if one accepts al-Rāzī's theory, the main point of *maskh* is not to downgrade humans to a status lower than theirs, but to cause a dramatic change in human bodies to a point that causes them utter confusion, frustration, and possibly also physical pain. Although al-Rāzī's view on the reality of *maskh* is only one among many, it still shows that it is possible to interpret *maskh* in a way that is not detrimental to the status of apes and swine. The fact that this analysis comes from someone who consistently argues for the superiority of humans to other animals makes it even more interesting.

An'ām's imperfection

The Qur'an also draws an analogy between the disbelievers and *an'ām* that, even if it does not place the former above the latter, still suggests the existence of shortcomings in this animal category. The first of the verses that draw this analogy says: "Already have We urged unto hell many of the jinn and humankind, having hearts wherewith they understand not, and having eyes wherewith they see not, and having ears wherewith they hear not. These are as cattle (*an'ām*) – nay, but they are farther astray (*aḍall*)! These are the neglectful" (7/al-A'raf: 179). The second says: "Or do you deem that most of them hear or understand. They are but as cattle – nay, but they are farther astray (*aḍallu sabīlā*)!" (25/al-Furqān: 44). Finally, the third verse says "God will cause those who believe and do good works to enter Gardens underneath which rivers flow; while those who disbelieve take their comfort in this life and eat even as the cattle eat, and the Fire is their habitation." (47/Muḥammad: 12). These verses, then, seem to suggest that certain livestock (*an'ām*) are astray, even if to a lesser degree than the disbelievers, and therefore one wonders: What makes them so from a Qur'anic perspective? The similarities between *an'ām* and disbelievers cited by our exegetes can be summed up in three points: inability to understand language, enslavement to carnal desires, and lack of rationality.

Inability to understand (human) language

In their comparison between *an'ām* and disbelievers, both ibn Kathīr and al-Ṭabarī explain that one of the traits common to both groups is their response to the calls directed to them. Ibn Kathīr says: "The way disbelievers respond to the call to believe in God is just like the way livestock respond to their shepherd's call. Livestock only hear the shepherd's voice and do not understand the content of what he says" (IK6: 459). In other words, both groups hear only sounds and cannot decipher the content of the messages directed to them. Therefore, the parallel that is established here is not between livestock and disbelievers themselves, but rather between their receptions to the calls directed to them. The calls that reach both groups, however, are both in human languages, and in the case of the disbelievers, it is in their own – and not just any – human language. Therefore, it is only fair to expect the disbelievers to be able to decipher and understand this message, whereas the same thing cannot rightfully be expected of livestock because the message that reaches them is in a language that is totally foreign to them. Based on this point, it is perhaps justified to propose that even though the Qur'an suggests that livestock are astray, the point is not that they are so in an absolute sense but only in the hypothetical case of being expected to achieve what is expected of humans, such as understanding human language. Therefore, comparing disbelievers to *an'ām* here is like comparing oranges to apples. If disbelievers obtain from a message that is directed to them only as little as livestock may obtain from it, or even only as little as livestock may obtain from the shepherd's call (i.e., nothing), then this must be a serious failing only on the disbeliever's part.

Moreover, ibn Kathīr states that livestock make out of the call directed to them more than what disbelievers make out of the message directed to them because even if livestock cannot decipher the shepherd's language, unlike the disbelievers, they still benefit from and respond to his call. In his opinion, this is one of the reasons why the Qur'an says that disbelievers are even more astray than livestock (IK6: 459). It is noteworthy that ibn Kathīr's treatment of this point reveals no value judgment of livestock because he does not present their inability to understand human language as an imperfection in them.

Obsession with carnal desires

The main imperfection shared between *an'ām* and disbelievers to which al-Qurṭubī repeatedly refers is their common preoccupation with the satisfaction of their sexual and gustatory appetites (Q7: 206; 13: 26; 16: 155).

Al-Qurṭubī has a strong Qur'anic foundation for this view in the third verse comparing disbelievers to *an'ām*, the last part of which, as we have seen earlier, establishes this gustatory parallel. In their interpretation of this verse, al-Ṭabarī, ibn Kathīr, and al-Rāzī also find that the point of the analogy is that both groups are appetite-driven, but al-Rāzī proposes two more ways of understanding this verse. In addition to their common main or sole preoccupation with the satisfaction of their desires, what brings disbelievers and *an'ām* together in this respect is their failure to use the food they eat as food for thought from which they should infer metaphysical truths. Therefore, *an'ām*'s imperfection in this case is considered to be mental because they are portrayed as lacking the rational faculties that would have allowed them to contemplate and reflect on aspects of God's creation. Likewise, in al-Rāzī's opinion both groups enjoy food in full insouciance, not realizing that the more they focus on the satisfaction of their desires, the closer they get to perdition: in the case of *an'ām* because more food only makes them fatter and thus closer to being slaughtered, and in the case of disbelievers because worldly pleasures distract them from the more important issues, hence causing them eternal damnation (R28: 45). So al-Rāzī sees another mental deficiency in *an'ām* but, in this case, at a more specific and pragmatic level because they fail to see the connection between two particular points: immediate pleasure and eventual perdition. In al-Rāzī's opinion, failure to see the connection between these two points is more fitting to the context of this verse. If this indeed is the case, then *an'ām*'s mental deficiency, to which this verse seems to point, is only a limited one, restricted to the level of failing to understand one particular point. Moreover, the exegetes would probably consider *an'ām* not blameworthy for failing to understand the connection between seeking pleasure and eventual perdition because they would consider that one of the purposes of these animals' creation is precisely that their meat be consumed by humans. So perhaps they were never meant or invited to understand the link between these two points, whereas in the case of the disbelievers, from the viewpoint of the exegetes, their attention is continually brought to this connection. Therefore, even though *an'ām*'s behavior in this context replicates that of disbelievers, it should hardly earn them any blame as they are doing what they are meant to do.

Lack of reflection

In his interpretation of al-A'rāf 7: 179, al-Ṭabarī numbers three traits that are common to disbelievers and livestock. One is their inability to

understand what is said to them; a second is their inability to discriminate between the useful and the useless among the things they see; and a third is that they have no grasp of the concepts of good and evil, as a consequence of which they cannot discriminate between them (Ṭ6: 131). Al-Ṭabarī is referring to two aspects of knowledge. The first is tangible with a functional aspect: It is related to the senses and has a direct impact on daily life. The second is more abstract: It is related to the idea of grasping the concepts of good and evil. Al-Rāzī makes the same point in a different way. He maintains that

Humans and all other animals partake in the physical faculties of nourishment, growth and reproduction, as well as in the benefits of the five senses ... However, what sets humans apart from other animals are their intellectual and rational faculties which guide them to the knowledge of God, just for the sake of knowing Him, and to the knowledge of what is good in order to do it. (R15: 53)

Therefore, for him also there is a tangible level of knowledge that has a functional value and an abstract level consisting of knowing God. In al-Rāzī's opinion, the reason for which disbelievers are like livestock is that they refrain from using their rational faculties for the prescribed purposes, that is, knowing God and recognizing what is good to put it into practice.

Although both al-Ṭabarī and al-Rāzī assert that only disbelievers are blameworthy, they still present livestock's inability to use their senses and their minds or hearts as an imperfection. What exempts livestock from blame is that, unlike disbelievers, their imperfection is the result of genuine lack of knowledge and not of deliberate neglect of facts on their part. In fact, in al-Rāzī's opinion, this inability is a good enough reason to raise livestock above disbelievers because in his opinion "the one who turns away from acquiring virtues while she/he is capable of acquiring them is more despicable than the one that does not acquire these virtues out of genuine inability" (R15: 54).

Nonetheless, al-Ṭabarī adds that despite livestock's lack of discrimination and inability to use their senses "properly" or "sufficiently," they still have enough judgment to be able to avoid harmful situations and to seek the nourishment that is best for them; and that, in his opinion, is one of the reasons why God says that disbelievers are even farther astray than livestock (Ṭ6: 131). Al-Rāzī also notes that al-Zajjāj made the same point about livestock's ability to distinguish what benefits them from what is harmful to them and to make the sound decision of choosing

the beneficial things and avoiding the harmful ones (R15: 54).⁶¹ Thus, in this view, *an'ām* are capable of solving problems that face them in their own environment and on which their survival depends. In this respect, they are resourceful and efficient enough. Additionally, both exegetes acknowledge that *an'ām* recognize their lords or owners and obey them, and al-Rāzī reports another opinion saying that *an'ām* get lost only if they have no guide (R15: 54). Therefore, both exegetes, but especially al-Ṭabarī, admit that livestock possess the functional aspect of knowledge that is necessary and sufficient for their own survival.

In addition, al-Ṭabarī concedes that, unlike disbelievers, livestock also intuitively know their Lord and obey Him. Although al-Rāzī appears to be less certain of livestock's possession of this type of knowledge, he still cites opinions to the same effect. For example, he quotes Muqātil (d. 150/767), who says, "livestock know their Lord and remember Him," and reports other opinions saying that they obey and glorify God. Because the two exegetes affirm or report that livestock possess both types of knowledge, the functional and the more abstract, then what is it from their viewpoint that constitutes these animals' imperfections? Al-Rāzī offers a clearer answer to this question than al-Ṭabarī. Because for him the intellectual and rational faculty is the element that distinguishes humans from other animals, then, from his viewpoint, what brings other animals or livestock down to a level lower than that of humans is specifically their incapability to rationalize and reflect. Therefore, for him reflection and contemplation themselves are virtues of which all nonhuman animals are deprived. Because the ultimate goal of reflection is knowledge of and obedience to God, however, then it becomes obvious that livestock have no need for such mental processes because they are presumed to have intuitively achieved the same goal that humans are potentially able to achieve only through deep thinking and contemplation. The reason why al-Ṭabarī and al-Rāzī see imperfections in livestock is that they impose their human values on them and judge them from their human lenses (in the case of al-Ṭabarī) or apply to them scientific criteria (in the case of al-Rāzī). Al-Rāzī may be more aware of this attitude and may argue that knowing God through deep thinking and contemplation is nobler than knowing Him intuitively. However, if livestock's only fault is that their behavior does not replicate that of humans or that they fail to meet the criteria set by humans, then this is an indication of anthropocentrism

⁶¹ See also al-Zajjāj, *Ma'āni al-Qur'an wa-ī'rābuh*, 2: 244.

more than of an imperfection in these animals. Anthropocentrism is in fact a characteristic of which Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' are fully aware. The humans in their treatise keep insisting that they are better than other animals, but often their only evidence of this is their own opinion or the standards they choose to apply.

The way al-Ṭabarī and al-Rāzī treat this topic illustrates the two types of anthropocentrism discussed earlier (casual versus formal). Unlike al-Ṭabarī, al-Rāzī's justification of livestock's inferior status is based on a rational argument and is more consistent with his approach. Whereas al-Ṭabarī simply cites livestock's lack of "free-will" (*ikhṭiyār*) and "discrimination" (*tamyiz*) among the reasons for their being astray, al-Rāzī elaborates more on this theme. Furthermore, when al-Rāzī discusses the different ways in which livestock may be superior to humans, such as their knowledge of and obedience to their Lord (R15: 54), he introduces this section with the passive verb *qīl* (it is said), thereby implying that it is an opinion that cannot be authenticated. In so doing, al-Rāzī appears to be unwilling to commit himself fully to these opinions and is careful of falling into self-contradictions. In contrast, al-Ṭabarī asserts that livestock are not discriminating, however, he still asserts that they can avoid things that may hurt them and seek things that may benefit them, hence acknowledging that they have at least some degree of discrimination. Self-contradiction in this respect is also manifest in al-Qurṭubī's discussion of Qur'anic animal themes. When trying to account for livestock's disorientation, this exegete cites an opinion stating that "while beasts (*al-bahā'im*) do not encompass the reality of God's oneness (*tawḥīd*) and prophethood, they do not hold wrong ideas about these concepts either" (Q13: 26), hence not objecting to the opinion that other animals lack knowledge of these two concepts. However, in a different context he asserts, "there is no difference among the '*ulamā*' that all animals have capacities for understanding (*afḥām*) and minds ('*uqūl*)." He also states that "it is not unlikely that beasts comprehend the phenomenon of the creation of the world and of all creatures and the concept of God's oneness (*wiḥdāniyyat Allāh*)" (Q13: 118).

However, even if al-Ṭabarī and al-Rāzī can be accused of imposing their human standards or expectations on nonhuman animals, they can hardly be accused of forcing a certain reading on the Qur'an. After all, the Qur'anic verses quoted clearly use the adjective *aḍall* in the comparison between disbelievers and livestock, indicating that both groups are astray, even if one of them is astray only to a lesser degree. Although it may be the case that the Qur'an presents livestock as being somehow disoriented,

other readings are also plausible. The first is the one found in ibn Kathir's treatment of the language issue. If one applies the same reasoning, then livestock's disorientation is not established as an absolute fact but is meant to be viewed as a disorientation vis-à-vis understanding human language or thinking about certain matters (such as the divine message) in the way that is expected of humans. In this case, the adjective *aḍall* is used with *an'ām* only for stylistic/rhetorical purposes, and livestock are faulty only to the extent that apples are faulty for failing to produce orange juice.

Moreover, the concept of *ḍalāl* does not have only moral or spiritual dimensions. In fact, Toshihiko Izutsu points out that the verb *ḍalla*, which is "one of the most common words in Arabic, may be used at various levels of discourse." One of these levels is "a concrete sense, i.e. 'to lose one's way while traveling in the desert.'" The verb can also be used in a metaphorical sense, in which case "we may distinguish between two different levels of discourse: religious and non-religious or secular."⁶² Izutsu gives a number of Qur'anic examples to illustrate both types of metaphorical usages. Two of the secular usages of this concept appear in 12/Yūsuf, when Jacob's sons describe their father as being "in manifest *ḍalāl*" for favoring their younger brother Joseph to them (verse 8), and the other is used by the "women in the city," who describe the "wife of the Governor" as being in "manifest *ḍalāl*" because of her infatuation with Joseph (verse 30). Izutsu comments on this type of usage saying that the term *ḍalāl* here "implies that the action in question is something which is felt to go against the normal moral sense."⁶³ The concept of *ḍalāl* in the Qur'an, however, occurs mostly in a religious sense, whereas in the most common type of this usage "straying" is "another name of *kufr* (disbelief),"⁶⁴ there is also a religious sense in which one can be straying from the right path without being a *kāfir* (disbeliever), as is the case with those who live "in complete ignorance of Revelation." Therefore, according to Izutsu's analysis this concept has four levels of meaning. The first simply consists of the concrete level of losing one's way (particularly in the desert). The second is a metaphorical yet not religious level, which is straying from social norms. The third is a metaphorical and unintentional religious straying from the right path, which might be excusable. And the fourth is the metaphorical and deliberate religious straying from the right path.

⁶² Toshihiko Izutsu, *Ethico-religious Concepts in the Qur'an* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 2002), 133–4.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 134.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 135.

Although Izutsu remarks that verse 25/al-Furqān: 44 “suggests that the cattle are naturally in the state of *ḍalāl*,” he does not specify which level of this word’s meaning (concrete; metaphorical and secular; metaphorical and religious yet unintentional; or metaphorical, religious, and deliberate) applies to *an‘ām* from his viewpoint. Considering the Qur’an’s general depiction of nonhuman animals as spiritual and religious beings, all of which know and worship God, it is highly doubtful that the Qur’an intends *an‘ām*’s *ḍalāl* in a religious sense, including the less (or non-) blameworthy religious sense that is the outcome of genuine ignorance of Revelation. One may ask here, could *an‘ām* be astray in the sense that by human standards of understanding worship they appear as such? Such presentation may be warranted by the fact that the Qur’an is addressed to human beings and that it often situates its worldview within the parameters of what is meaningful to and imaginable by them.

In my opinion, however, this Qur’anic stance may simply be connected to a particular derivative of the verb *ḍalla*. In Arabic, the noun *ḍalla* (pl. *ḍawāll*) refers to a “beast which has lost its way [in a concrete manner]” as explained by ibn Manẓūr. This lexicographer also cites a ḥadīth condemning people who take possession of *ḍawāll al-ibil* (lost camels), which are supposed to be left alone until their owners find them or they die naturally; yet encourage them to take possession of *ḍallat al-ghanam*” (lost sheep or goats), as they can “either be yours, your brother’s [i.e. the original owner], or the wolf’s.”⁶⁵ It is noteworthy also that the ḥadīth’s dealing with the issue of *ḍalla* among nonhuman animals specifically mentions camels and *ghanam* (sheep and goats), all of which are considered *an‘ām*. In view of this, it is perhaps plausible to view the Qur’anic comparison between the *ḍalāl* of disbelievers and that of *an‘ām* as a comparison between the religious straying of disbelievers from the right path and the concrete straying of *ḍawāll al-an‘ām* (straying livestock), a phenomenon with which Arabs at that time were quite familiar. In other words, this analogy could simply be between the mundane straying of certain nonhuman animals and spiritual straying of the disbelievers to give a vivid illustration of the more abstract scenario.

However, even if one insists on understanding these verses as somehow conveying the spiritual straying of livestock (an understanding that clearly conflicts with the general depiction of nonhuman animals in the

⁶⁵ Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-‘Arab*, s.v. “ḍ-l-l.” For the ḥadīth, see al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, no. 91. The difference in rulings may be a result of the fact that camels are more capable of defending themselves from predators.

Qur'an), it still remains true that these verses do not place livestock below humans. In fact, the verses in which livestock's disorientation is suggested are amongst the clearest evidence that humans' superiority to certain other animals on the exclusive basis of species membership does not have a Qur'anic foundation because they place a category of humans – the disbelievers – below a category of nonhuman animals. In their attempt to account for the Qur'anic assertion that the disbelievers are worse or farther astray than livestock, the exegetes had to apply a number of criteria, some of which are God-centered instead of human-centered. The most important among these, as pointed out, is knowledge of and obedience to God. The four exegetes either confirm or at least report opinions asserting that all nonhuman animals intuitively know and obey God, which makes them better than the humans who do not. However, al-Rāzī and al-Qurṭubī, while stating or reporting this fact about nonhuman animals, still seem unable to imagine how obtuse creatures such as livestock can grasp the idea of God, as a consequence of which they both feel compelled to account for livestock's superiority to disbelievers in other ways as well. Al-Qurṭubī, as mentioned earlier, points out that even if “beasts” (*bahā'im*) do not grasp the truth of God's oneness, they do not hold the opposite view (Q13: 26). Therefore, he presumes that the neutral state consisting of lack of knowledge is better than the state of twisting truths or of possessing inaccurate knowledge. Al-Rāzī makes the same point by stating that although the hearts of livestock contain no knowledge, they are also free of ignorance, which he defines as misinterpretation of truth. Therefore, both exegetes would grant (in certain contexts) that humans know more than livestock; however, to account for these Qur'anic verses, they state that knowledge alone is not sufficient to grant humans a status higher than that of livestock because part of what humans may consider knowledge is described by al-Rāzī as exactly its opposite, that is, ignorance (*jahl*).⁶⁶ Apart from knowledge per se, the exegetes also apply the criterion of the impact of knowledge on others. Al-Rāzī says, “livestock's lack of knowledge is not harmful to anyone, while the disbelievers' misconceptions cause enormous harm, since they deter people from following God's path” (R24:76). Therefore, the functional aspect of knowledge also is God-centered because the greatest harm in this situation consists of deterring other people from God's path. Finally, al-Rāzī says, “livestock

⁶⁶ On the concept of *jahl*, see J. R. T. M. Peters, *God's Created Speech: A Study in the Speculative Theology of the Mu'tazilī Qāḍī l-Quḍāt Abū l-Ḥasan 'Abd al-Jabbār ibn Aḥmad al-Hamadhānī* (Leiden: Brill, 1976), 43.

do not deserve punishment for their lack of knowledge whereas disbelievers deserve the worst kind of punishment" (R24: 76). Therefore, the distinct and ultimate criterion in this respect is the final outcome of deeds. The one that will end up being punished is decidedly below the one that will not be punished.

What is also noteworthy is that by applying these theocentric criteria, livestock become better than the majority of humans. The reason is that, in addition to asserting that livestock are less astray than disbelievers, the Qur'an also asserts that most humans belong to the category of disbelievers. The Qur'an says, "And though you try much, most people will not believe" (12/Yūsuf: 103). It also asserts: "And verily We have displayed for humankind in this Qur'an all kind of similitudes, but most of humankind refuse aught save disbelief" (17/al-Isrā': 89); "And verily We have repeated it [the Qur'an] among them that they may remember, but most of humankind begrudge aught save ingratitude." (25/al-Furqān: 50). Although al-Ṭabarī and al-Qurṭubī understand "most people" in the context of these verses to refer only to most of the Prophet Muḥammad's people (Ṭ7: 311; Q9: 178), ibn Kathīr occasionally takes it to mean most people in all times and places (IK8: 82). Al-Rāzī unambiguously states that disbelievers and those who are disobedient to God (*fussāq*, pl. of *fāsiq*) outnumber by far believers who are sincere toward God in religion (*al-mu'minūn al-mukhlīṣūn*, R11: 38).

Conclusion

Even though the Qur'an states that many animals are at the service of humans and goes into detail concerning how humans are entitled to use them, I have tried to demonstrate that nonhuman animals' servility is not necessarily an indication of their lower status. What substantiates this point is the last part of the discussion. *An'ām* (livestock), which in the Qur'an are said to be at the service of all humans without exception, are also clearly said to be less astray and presumably better than disbelievers. I have tried to argue as well that the theme of vicegerency is read into the Qur'an. I do not think that God appointed humans to represent Him either among one another, nor, more importantly, among nonhuman beings. I have also tried to demonstrate that another theme that may suggest nonhuman animals' inferiority to humans, *maskh*, does not necessarily convey this inferiority because, at least in al-Rāzī's interpretation, the point of *maskh* is not to downgrade humans to a status lower than their own, but rather to inflict on them an extreme type of physical pain and psychological trauma by placing their souls in bodies that are

totally strange to them. Third, I have proposed that it is possible to view *an'āms'* supposed imperfections (being astray) in a way that eliminates their denigration, as it is possible that their imperfection is established as a contextual rather than absolute fact (imperfection vis-à-vis understanding human language), or that the mode of straying by the *an'ām* is of a mundane type, and not a moral one, like that of humans. More importantly, I have highlighted that the very verses that point to *an'āms'* imperfection plausibly contain a clear refutation of the hierarchical system that places nonhuman animals below humans.

Depiction of Nonhuman Animals in the Qur'an

In the same way that the Qur'an has a verse addressing diversity among humans, and which could be considered one of the important foundations for egalitarian tendencies at a human level, it also has a verse addressing diversity among species, and which potentially could justify a non-speciesist reading of the text. The verse in which Muslims "have found sanction for egalitarianism of many kinds,"¹ Marlow explains, is 49/al-Ḥujurāt: 13: "O mankind! We have created you male and female, and have made you nations and tribes that you may know one another. The noblest of you, in the sight of God, is the best in conduct. God is Knower, Aware." The corresponding verse at a species level occurs in a sura named after the most frequently mentioned nonhuman animal category in the Qur'an (*an'ām*) and announces that "There is not an animal in the earth, nor a flying creature flying on two wings, but they are peoples like you. We have neglected nothing in the Book (of Our decrees). Then unto their Lord they will be gathered" (6/al-An'ām: 38).

Moving from the broad statement found in this verse to the more detailed Qur'anic themes addressing aspects of the nature and status of nonhuman animals, the latter come across as multidimensional beings with impressive depth. For example, all earthly nonhuman animals are portrayed as spiritual beings. Furthermore, every being, human and nonhuman, is fully included within the scope of divine attention and is equally under the full control of God. Similarly, nonhuman animals share with humans their total dependence on God for their sustenance and

¹ Marlow, *Hierarchy and Egalitarianism*, 2.

continued existence. Additionally, they, as much as humans and every other created being, serve as signs of creation.

Although these themes have had only a limited impact on conceptions of the status of nonhuman animals in Islamic tradition (with the notable exception of the celebrated topic of animals as signs of creation), they are nonetheless fully acknowledged. By contrast, another set of Qur'anic animal themes – those dealing with the natures of nonhuman animals – have generated conflicting opinions and have been the subject of considerable controversy. There is sufficient evidence in the Qur'an to suggest that nonhuman animals are considered moral, rational, and even accountable beings. However, this depiction clearly conflicts with the general way humans experience nonhuman animals as well as with many of the perceptions that Muslims in general hold of other species. After all, the presumption that nonhuman animals lack rational faculties is reflected in the very language in which the Qur'an was revealed, wherein grammatical forms distinguish between the two categories of *'āqil* (i.e., rational; consisting of humans, angels, and jinn) and *ghayr 'āqil* (i.e., nonrational; consisting of nonhuman earthly animals and inanimate beings). Similarly, Islamic jurisprudence, as I will explain, clearly distinguishes between those who are *mukallaf* (i.e., required to follow the precepts of religion, consisting roughly of sane human adults in addition to angels and jinn) and *ghayr mukallaf* (generally applying to children, insane humans, and nonhuman animals). Therefore, in this chapter I would like to start with a discussion of 6/al-An'ām: 38, particularly the assertion of similarity between human and nonhuman species, after which I will discuss the status of animals in their capacity as God's creation, followed by an exploration of the various components of the Qur'anic depiction of nonhuman animals.

UMAMUN AMTHĀLUKUM (PEOPLES LIKE YOU)

The only time the Qur'an compares humans with the largest group of other animals known to us occurs when it says that “they are peoples like you (*umamun amthālukum*)” (6/al-An'ām:38). While this assertion of similarity is quite remarkable, it is still of note that this verse does not seem to specify in what way humans and other animals are alike. Our exegetes came up with many propositions in this respect, identifying similarities between humans and other species. Nonetheless, one can still discern a tendency to minimize the significance of this similarity,



FIGURE 4. Hawk (şaqr), Crane / Sea bird (al-karkī / tā'ir al-baḥr), peacock (al-tāwūs) from 'Ajā'ib al-makhlūqāt (Wonders of Creation) by al-Qazvini. Reproduced from Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.: Purchase, F1954.103. With permission.

emphasize humans' distinction, or even interpret this verse in terms that are unflattering to nonhuman animals.

In the opinion of our four exegetes and the authorities they cite, the several traits that humans and other animals have in common range from the outward and obvious to the subtle and controversial. For example, some exegetes interpret the phrase "*umamun amthālukum*" as "various species" (*aṣnāf muṣannafa*) or "creatures like you" (*khalq amthālukum*), hence apparently establishing no point beyond the fact that humans and other animals are simply members of different species (T5: 186). Similarly, al-Rāzī cites an opinion that interprets this verse as referring to the fact that the members of each species look like one another, enjoy each other's company, and reproduce. However, al-Rāzī himself dismisses this interpretation as hardly informative (*lā yufid fā'ida mu'tabara*) because in his opinion these features are too obvious to deserve mention (R12: 176). Another view – which in al-Rāzī's opinion is also stating the obvious – considers the point of this analogy to be that "God created them [other animals], that He manages their lives, and that He guaranteed their sustenance," presumably as He did and continues to do with humans (R12: 176). Although al-Rāzī dismisses this view as not worthy of mention as well, this is still a valuable comment because, as I try to argue later, its point may be that all animals have a share in God's attention.

Considering God's attention to all His creatures to be the point of this analogy is indeed the opinion held by al-Rāzī himself, as he states that God's favor (*faḍl*), providence (*ināya*), mercy (*raḥma*), and beneficence (*ihsān*) extend to all His creation (R12: 174). Al-Qurṭubī considers that nonhuman animals resemble humans in that they are "created beings pointing to, in need of, and sustained by, their Creator" (Q6: 270). Interestingly, al-Qurṭubī also considers the fact that God has created, guaranteed the sustenance of, and acts justly toward nonhuman animals demands that humans should neither mistreat other species nor exceed the limit of what they themselves have been permitted to do with them (Q6: 270). Similarly, in his discussion of this verse, al-Rāzī cites a ḥadīth in which the Prophet is reported to have said that "A bird which is killed for no reason will complain to God on the Judgment Day saying, 'My Lord, this person killed me for no reason. S/he neither ate my flesh nor allowed me to continue to live'" (R12: 176).² What is remarkable about these comments is that, although the concrete dimension of nonhuman animals' welfare is not addressed in the verse 6/al-An'ām: 38, al-Qurṭubī

² Al-Nasā'ī, *Sunan*, no. 4463.

and al-Rāzī still perceived a link between this and the abstract dimension of the animal question (i.e., their status). What most likely led al-Qurṭubī in particular to perceive this correspondence is the legal aspect of his *tafsir*, as one of his goals in writing this work is to deduce legal matters (*aḥkām*) from the divine Scripture, including those applying to the treatment of nonhuman animals. Regardless of this exegete's goals, however, it is still impressive that although the Qur'an hardly touches upon the question of nonhuman animals' welfare – just by highlighting their worth – it still inspired some of its readers to reach this conclusion. In fact, al-Rāzī's and al-Qurṭubī's reference to the theme of nonhuman animals' welfare in this context suggests that in their understanding the phrase “*umamun amthālukum*” could mean that other animals matter the way humans do, and because of this, humans have no right to take advantage of them, excluding some particular usages that have been spelled out.

Although the preceding interpretations have identified many aspects in which human and nonhuman animals share some similarities, they still deal with external features, particularly with all animals in their capacities as God's creatures. Other discussions, by contrast, point to internal features that human and nonhuman animals presumably have in common. For example, ibn 'Abbās is reported to have identified four characteristics supposedly shared by all animals; these are knowledge of, bearing witness to, glorifying, and praising God (*ya'rifūnāni wa-yuwaḥḥidūnāni wa-yasabbihūnāni wa-yahmudūnāni*, R12: 176). Therefore, according to this report, ibn 'Abbās is not only suggesting that nonhuman animals have spirituality in common with humans, but specifically an Islamic version of this spirituality (considering the emphasis on God's unity). What is interesting about this view is not the attribution of this (Islamic) spiritual dimension to nonhuman animals, because that is substantiated by other Qur'anic statements, but rather its attribution to all humans, even though the Qur'an declares that most of the latter are disbelievers. This attitude, in fact, can often be discerned in discussions of animals' status. Although, in tune with the Qur'an, exegetes can be very critical of certain human behaviors and often acknowledge the negative motivations from which all or most humans may suffer, as soon as they compare humans to other earthly species their assumptions about their own species immediately switch to an idealized self-image, which hardly corresponds to the Qur'anic depiction of the human race.

We find that nonhuman animals are often afforded this spiritual dimension in other commentaries as well. Abū al-Dardā', the Prophet's companion who is reported to have been particularly sensitive to his camel's

well-being, is also recorded as having said that “the minds of beasts (*bahā'im*) are totally imperceptive except in four matters: knowledge of God, search for sustenance, recognition of the opposite sex, and readiness for copulation” (R12: 176). Therefore, although this companion adopts a minimalist attitude toward the mental faculties of nonhuman animals, he still acknowledges that they know God. What is ironical about Abū al-Dardā's statement, however (assuming the authenticity of the reports attributed to him), is that, despite the fact that he holds such views about other animals, he still addressed his camel in the way described (on page 86), indicating that, in his actual dealings with this animal, he ascribed to it more mental complexity than his general views of other animals would seem to allow.

In contrast with this minimalist approach, al-Ṭabarī seems to attribute considerable complexity to nonhuman animals. Paraphrasing parts of the Qur'anic statement, he says (addressing humans),

He created them [nonhuman animals] as various species (*ajnās mujannasa* and *aṣnāf muṣannaṣa*). They have knowledge as you do (*ta'rifu kamā ta'rifūn*), they manage that for which they have been created as you do (*tataṣarrafu fīmā sukḥ-khīrat lahu kamā tataṣarrafūn*), and all their deeds and misdeeds are recorded for them in the Mother of the Book. After this, He will cause them to die, resurrect them, and recompense them. (Ṭ5: 186)

What is remarkable about this comment is that, even though it does not negate the fundamental differences between humans and other animals, it still affirms the existence of similarities at certain – perhaps deeper – levels. Nonhuman animals do not know *what* humans know, but rather *as* humans know, that is, much like humans have knowledge of certain things, other species have knowledge of other things too. Therefore, one may infer from al-Ṭabarī's commentary that the fact that human and nonhuman animals do not share the same type of knowledge does not imply that what other animals know does not qualify as knowledge. Similarly, the fact that nonhuman animals do not live or manage their lives the way humans do should not lead to an assumption that they have no system: as each species lives its life the way it is intended to (by God). The reference to the element of accountability, alluded to in this verse (and consequently acknowledged by the three other exegetes as well), adds to the complexity of the nonhuman animal world and emphasizes the idea that they live, or are expected to live, according to certain norms and standards. These elements indicate that al-Ṭabarī attributes to other animals at least a certain degree of mental and psychological complexity. Al-Ṭabarī still maintains that humans have certain things in which other

animals do not have a share: reason (*ʿaql*) and understanding (*fabm*) (T5: 186). In his opinion, however, these privileges do not serve to elevate the status of humans, but rather to increase their responsibilities; these features make it more incumbent upon humans to be thankful to God and to acknowledge their obligations toward Him.

A certain degree of mental complexity is not the limit of what some commentators on this verse were ready to extend to other animals. Al-Rāzī reports that

Those who believe in the transmigration of souls claim that if human souls are happy, obedient to God, adhering to true knowledge, and upright, then after their death they will dwell in angelic bodies, or perhaps they say these souls will be in the company of angels. However, if they are wretched, ignorant, and disobedient, they will dwell in the bodies of animals. The more wretched these souls are, the lower (*akbass*) the species to which they will belong ... The adherents of this opinion add that all these souls know their Lord and are aware of their happiness or wretchedness. They maintain also that God has sent to each species among them an apostle from among themselves. They find corroboration for their claim in this verse (6/al-Anʿām: 38), which calls each species a nation (*umma*), and the verse stating “and there is not a nation (*umma*) but a Warner has passed among them.” (35/Fāṭir: 24; R12: 177)

These views correspond very closely to the ideas of a student of the Muʿtazilī scholar Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm al-Nazzām (d. 231/845), named Aḥmad ibn Ḥābiṭ, who, in ibn Ḥazm’s (d. 456/1064) opinion, cannot be considered a Muslim.³ Obviously, both al-Rāzī and ibn Ḥazm reject these views (such as the belief in the transmigration of souls), mainly for being inconsistent with Islamic doctrines, but also (in the opinion of ibn Ḥazm) for being inconsistent with reason. The Andalusian scholar argues that

By rational necessity (*bi-ḍarūrat al-ʿaql*), we know that God – Exalted is He – sends religious laws (*al-sharāʿi*) only to those who can make sense of them, as He says “God tasks not a soul beyond its scope” (2/al-Baqara: 285). We find that with the exception of humans, all animals follow recurrent patterns in the way they manage their lives and reproduce. None of them avoid a deed performed by another species member. This is something humans can easily observe among those animals which live among them, such as livestock, horses, mules, asses, birds, and other animals. This, however, is not the case with humans. Based on this, it becomes evident that religious laws do not speak to beasts (*bahāʿim*), and that ibn Ḥābiṭ’s claim is false.⁴

³ For Aḥmad ibn Ḥābiṭ, see Aḥmad Ibn ʿAlī ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Lisān al-mizān*, (Beirut: Dār al-Bashāʿir al-Islāmiyya, 2002) 1: 449 (under Aḥmad ibn Khābiṭ al-Muʿtazilī, entry no. 486). See also, ʿAlī ibn Aḥmad ibn Saʿīd ibn Ḥazm al-Andalusī al-Zāhirī, *Al-Faṣl fī al-mīlāl wa-al-ahwāʾ wa-al-niḥāl* (Beirut: Dār al-Jil, 1996), 1: 149.

⁴ Ibn Ḥazm, *Al-Faṣl fī al-mīlāl*, 1: 150.

The main premise on which ibn Ḥazm's argument rests, then, is the way humans experience other animals. Furthermore, although this Andalusian scholar bases his theory on actual observation of certain nonhuman animals' behaviors, he still assumes that what applies to some animals must necessarily be true of all nonhuman animals. Ibn Ḥazm, however, is still aware that his premise may be insufficient for establishing certain views about other beings. He says, "It may still be asked 'Who knows? Perhaps all animals have languages and rational faculties?'" and "what if their rationality differs from ours?" However, ibn Ḥazm brings up these questions only to refute them on rational grounds. For example, concerning the possibility that other animals might possess some form of rationality, he says,

It is not possible to conceive of a life which differs from the idea of life as we know it, nor of a type of growth which differs from what we consider to be growth, nor of a type of redness which differs from what we consider to be red, nor of a body which differs from what we consider to be a body, etc. Should any of these things differ from the way we conceive of them then these names would not apply to them at all. Or, it would be as if we call water fire, or we call honey a stone, which is nonsense. Therefore, anything that differs from what we consider to be rationality cannot be called rationality.⁵

Clearly, then, ibn Ḥazm's definition of rationality (which in his opinion corresponds precisely and almost exclusively to human rationality) is formulated so as to rule out the possibility of other earthly animals' possession of this feature. In other words, because nonhuman (earthly) animals are not rational in the way humans define rationality, they cannot be characterized by humans as rational. Ibn Ḥazm's decision to assign the word *rationality* exclusively to the human expression of this concept is not necessarily problematic, but the claim that nonhuman animals do not have mental processes that may share similarities with what we call rationality among humans is a different issue. Although empirically it is difficult to either prove or disprove ibn Ḥazm's views about other animals, from a Qur'anic standpoint, there is evidence suggesting that language and rationality (in some ways even as understood by humans) are not the monopoly of the human race.

Ibn Ḥazm also endeavors to prove the epistemological value of reason as a source of knowledge. One rationale that he offers for this stance is that "we depend on reason to know God and to confirm the truthfulness of prophethood – without which nothing is valid (*lā yaṣuḥḥu shay'un*

⁵ Ibid., 1: 151.

illā bi-mūjibihā).”⁶ Therefore, in ibn Ḥazm’s opinion, doubting what our senses and reason tell us about the nature of nonhuman animals will cast doubt on all our mental processes, including those dealing with essential matters, such as doctrinal questions of faith. This scholar does not overlook to address the Qur’anic material that affirms nonhuman animals’ possession of certain traits that are not confirmed by human senses and reason. These views, which correspond largely to those of other rationalist Muslim scholars (including al-Rāzī), will be discussed. At this point, it suffices to point out that, even if ibn Ḥabīṭ’s views about other animals have never gained currency (partly, perhaps, because of his other ideas, such as reincarnation, which are inconsistent with Islamic beliefs), they still show how far the Qur’anic material on other animals lends itself to favorable views about them. Just by calling nonhuman animals *umam* (nations, peoples) and asserting that they are similar to humans, it became imaginable that they have prophets among them, a thing which is taken by many Muslims as a great sign of honor.

However, although this verse prompted most of our exegetes to attribute to other animals traits that tend to highlight their complexity and worth, in one instance this tendency is reversed. The point of verse 38, al-An‘ām in an opinion attributed to the Meccan scholar of Ḥadīth Sufyān ibn ‘Uyayna (d. 198/814), is that any characteristic that exists among “animals” is reflected in human society. Therefore, one finds among people those who are brave like a lion, those who howl like a dog, those who are proud like a peacock, and those who have low taste like a pig, which would turn away from good food and prefer to it someone’s vomit. Neither al-Rāzī nor al-Qurṭubī seem to object to ibn ‘Uyayna’s interpretation. It is interesting that the same verse that serves to elevate the status of nonhuman animals and assign to them considerable complexity in some interpretations can still be read through such stereotyping lenses.

Animals in relation to God

Regardless of how humans are believed to differ from other animals, in their capacities as God’s creation all animals stand on an equal footing. Whether as dependents on God for sustenance and continued existence, subjects of divine control and knowledge, or signs of God’s creation, all animals in the Qur’an are indeed equals. Perhaps the only dimension in which humans are sometimes thought to come before other species in

⁶ Ibn Ḥazm, *Al-Faṣl*, 1: 151.

exegetical treatments is that of animals as recipients of divine benevolence. In this respect, although it is consistently acknowledged that other animals have an abundant share in divine kindness, it is sometimes claimed that human's share is still more copious.

Creation and sustenance

The fact that all animals are equal in that God is their Creator is brought up in the commentaries on 6/al-An'ām: 38. Although, as we have seen, al-Rāzī dismisses this piece of information as a truism, this is still an important point because it may be implying that in the same way God cared to create, manage the lives of, and provide for humans, He cared to do the same with other animals. In this respect, humans definitely belong with the rest of creation, all of which stand in equal need of the Creator to come into existence and of His sustenance to continue to live thereafter.

The Qur'an also says, "And there is not an animal (*dābba*) in the earth but the sustenance thereof depends on God" (11/Hūd: 6), and "how many an animal (*dābba*) there is that does not bear its own provision! God provides for it and for you. He is the Hearer, the Knower" (29/al-'Ankabūt: 60). In his commentary on the first verse, ibn Kathīr points out that "God has guaranteed (*takaffala bi*) the sustenance of all animals, regardless of their sizes or whereabouts" (IK7: 414). Al-Ṭabarī, who is careful to point out that humans are included in the category of *dawābb*, explains that "whatever nourishment reaches any animal is from God" (Ṭ7: 3). He also quotes Mujāhid who notes that "it is possible that God sometimes does not provide the sustenance of an animal until it dies of starvation. However, whenever any animal obtains nourishment, it is surely sustenance coming from God" (Ṭ7: 3). Therefore, in this respect, humans are not in any way privileged over other creatures; in fact, they are simply treated as members of the larger group of animals, which are in equal need of sustenance and whose provisions are equally guaranteed.

Furthermore, al-Qurṭubī draws a distinction between the meanings of the words *rizq* (sustenance) and *milk* (property), leading to the conclusion that if humans are not privileged over other animals in the domain of sustenance, they hardly have any significant material privileges at all. He says,

The true meaning of "*rizq*" is that which nourishes a living creature, allowing its soul to stay alive and its body to grow. It is not possible to take the words *rizq* and *milk* as synonyms, because beasts (*al-bahā'im*) obtain their *rizq* although they do not own it, breastfed infants consume their mother's milk although it

does not belong to them, and it is said in the Qur'an, "in the heaven is your providence (*rizqukum*)" (51/al-Dhāriyāt: 22) although nothing in the heaven belongs to us. If *rizq* and *milk* were synonyms, then it would have been possible to say about someone who eats from the property of someone else that s/he eats from the *rizq* of that person, which is impossible, for each one can consume only the *rizq* that has been divinely allotted to it/him/her." (Q9: 6)

From this analysis, one can conclude that, as far as *rizq* is concerned, there is no distinction between human and nonhuman animals. Each one of them can only (and has to) consume the *rizq* that has been predestined for it/him/her, regardless of who initially owns the nourishment. What makes this distinction worthy of mention is that *rizq*, which according to al-Qurṭubī's definition is required for any living creature's survival, is often presented in the Qur'an as one of the true signs of divine providence, whereas property or affluence (in Qur'anic terminology: *matā'*, *māl*, etc.), one of the fields in which humans may claim distinction over other animals, is often presented in the same text as having little value, or even as a temptation, the point of which is to test humans. Indeed, Ikhwān al-Ṣafā's human characters insist on using aspects of their lives that are related to affluence in food and clothing in their claim of superiority over other animals to which the latter respond by enumerating the several ways in which this affluence becomes a source of distress for humans both in this life and in the next. In the nonhuman animals' refutation, it is argued that humans have to go through the hardships of learning skills, working hard, traveling, suffering from social humiliation and psychological anxiety, managing property, and suffering from health problems, and all for the sake, and as a result, of obtaining and maintaining opulence. Humans also run the risk of suffering the consequences of their indulgence in material things in the afterlife. Opulence, in which humans take so much pride, may thus become a reason for their eternal damnation.⁷

The assurance of sustenance for all living beings is presented as an inspiring and religiously empowering factor in our exegetes' treatment of this theme. Al-Rāzī explains that "since God provides for animals that do not store their food for future use, and for animals too weak to carry their food, such as lice, fleas, and worms, He surely provides for human beings. Therefore, rely on Him!" (R25: 77). To illustrate this point further, al-Rāzī relates a story in which the Prophet Moses, having had concerns about his own family after he was entrusted with the divine message, was

⁷ Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', *The Case of the Animals*, 249; *Fī aṣnāf al-ḥayawanāt*, 193–4.

commanded to hit a rock with his staff. When Moses did that, he found another rock inside the first one and a third rock inside the second. Inside the third and last rock, he found a tiny worm in whose mouth there was something that served as its nourishment. Then, al-Rāzī adds, “the veil was lifted from Moses’ hearing so that he could hear the worm saying: ‘Glory to the One who sees me, hears what I say, knows where I am, and never forgets about me!’” (R17: 149). Presumably, this reassured Moses that God, Who did not neglect this worm despite its size and location, would surely look after his family.

Attention and control

The theme of God’s full knowledge and awareness of all animals has already been encountered in 6/al-An‘ām: 38, where it is stated that “We have neglected nothing in the Book [of Our decrees].” Similarly, after the assurance of sustenance for all animals, the verse 11/Hūd: 6 continues by saying about each animal that God “knows its habitation and its repository. All is in a clear record.” In his commentary on this verse, ibn Kathīr points out that “the habitat and every single movement of each animal is known to God. He provides for each living creature, regardless of its whereabouts and of its size” (IK7: 414). Therefore, one of the points of the emphasis on God’s exhaustive and detailed knowledge in this respect seems to be at once the assurance of tailored attention for and full control over each individual being. In other words, because God knows about all His creation, including the tiniest and most hidden among them, there is no possibility He would fail to provide for one of them out of forgetfulness or unawareness of their existence. Likewise, His comprehensive and detailed knowledge makes it impossible for any creature to commit any act without His knowledge (and without that act being recorded). The last point (control) can be inferred from the verse 6/al-An‘ām: 38 (Then to their Lord they will be gathered), which in the opinion of many exegetes refers to all animals’ accountability in the hereafter, and is made more explicitly in 11/Hūd: 56, where the Prophet Hūd addresses his people saying, “I have put my trust in God, my Lord and your Lord. Not an animal but He grasps it by the forelock! My Lord is on a straight path.”

Our exegetes hold different opinions about the meaning of *mustaqarr* and *mustawda‘*, occurring in 11/Hūd: 6 and translated here as habitation and repository. Among the suggested meanings of the word *mustaqarr* are the ultimate destination that any creature ever reaches, its habitat, the womb where it is conceived, the number of the days of its life, and

its ultimate destiny, that is, whether it will go to paradise or to hellfire; and among the meanings of the word *mustawda'* are the place where it dies, loins (*al-ṣulb*), the place where it is resurrected, and its grave. These different meanings indicate that the exegetes want to emphasize that God not only knows about each single animal, but that He knows about them at each stage of their existence, from before their conception through their resurrection and reward or punishment thereafter. In fact, al-Ṭabarī makes the explicit point that God has always known about these animals, as “their number, the amount of their sustenance, the time they spend in their ‘*mustaqarr*’ and the time they spend in their ‘*mustawda'*’ have all been recorded in the Tablet even before their creation” (Ṭ7: 4). Al-Rāzī asserts that God, in addition to knowing about animals at all the stages of their existences, is the only one who knows about the number, natures, limbs, states, nourishments, venoms, habitations, and what is agreeable and disagreeable to the natures of all animals (R17: 149). Although the main point of such commentaries is to highlight the comprehensiveness of God’s knowledge, it is still clear that the allocation of divine attention to each animal on a full and individual basis and *the specific mention* thereof in the Qur’an points to all animals’ importance in this book. The conclusions one may draw from this are (1) that each animal *matters* enough to obtain a substantial share of God’s attention and mercy and (2) that its deeds are *significant* enough that they are recorded and reviewed on Judgment Day to determine accountability.

Moreover, ibn Kathīr’s specification that divine attention is not proportional to the size of the animal in question (IK7: 414) indicates that human criteria, in which size and other animals’ degree of similarity to human beings are sometimes used to prioritize the interests of certain animals to others, do not correspond to Qur’anic criteria. In fact, the irrelevance of such criteria from a divine perspective can plausibly be inferred from the very first mention of a nonhuman animal in the Qur’an, where it is stated “God does not disdain to coin the similitude of a gnat or any smaller animal” (2/al-Baqara: 26). Discussing the occasion of the revelation (*asbāb nuzūl*) of this verse, ibn Kathīr explains that “When God mentioned spiders and flies in the Qur’an the idolaters said [mockingly] ‘how can such [insignificant] creatures be mentioned [in a divine scripture]?’” (IK1: 326)? This reaction indicates that a part of the Qur’an’s Meccan audience considered size an important criterion in their evaluation of animals; the smaller the animal, the less worthy it was in their view. Commenting on this, ibn Kathīr says, “From a divine perspective nothing is too insignificant to use in striking a parable, even if it is as tiny

as a gnat. In the same way that God cared to create it, He does not disdain to coin a similitude with it" (IK1: 326).

Another indication that human classification systems perhaps do not correspond to divine ones can also be perceived in attitudes toward the so-called king of the animal kingdom, the lion. Although there is (possibly) only one passing allusion to this animal in the Qur'an (74/al-Muddaththir: 51),⁸ we find that al-Damīri's only instance of not sticking to the alphabetical order of his *Ḥayāt al-ḥayawān* is the entry on the lion, which he prefers to put at the beginning of his work because of the superiority of this animal. By contrast, insects such as flies (22/al-Ḥajj: 73), spiders (29/al-ʿAnkabūt: 41), bees (16/al-Naḥl: 68), and ants (27/al-Naml: 18) are prominent in Qur'anic discussions.

The irrelevance of size and other related criteria may bring to mind the question of where to draw the line in regard to animals. Although our exegetes do not address this question in a direct manner, an answer can still be inferred from their general treatment of different Qur'anic animal themes. As far as divine attention is concerned, our exegetes would probably agree that no line needs to be drawn. The need to draw the line may originate from human limitations and conflicting interests and needs, or possibly also from a combination of anthropocentric and anthropomorphic attitudes (prioritize the interests of those animals that are more like us). Irrespective of whether or not our exegetes would concede the irrelevance of the anthropocentric factor from a divine perspective, all of them would certainly agree that human needs and limitations do not apply to God. That explains why each and every animal can (and most likely does) matter equally to God.

The assumption that humans may matter more to God just because of their species membership can be refuted through reading the Qur'anic story of Thamūd, in which all of this tribe's wicked members were destroyed for assaulting a she-camel and possibly also its calf. The first mention of this story occurs in 7/al-A'raf: 73 in which it is stated,

And to (the tribe of) Thamud (We sent) their brother Salih. He said: O my people! Serve God. You have no other God save Him. A wonder from your Lord has come unto you. This is the camel of God, a token unto you; so let her feed in God's earth, and touch her not with hurt lest painful torment seize you.

In their commentaries on this and related verses, our exegetes tell us that after God destroyed the tribe of ʿĀd, He made Thamūd their successors (*istakhlaf*), however, after this tribe prospered, they deviated from

⁸ In addition to lion, the word *qaswara* has other possible meanings (see Appendix 1).

God's path, so God sent to them Ṣāliḥ, who called them to God's path for many years, but to almost no avail. Eventually, some tribe members tried to rid themselves of his preaching by concluding a deal with him. They suggested that he accompany them to the place where they celebrated their idols and let each of them pray to his lord, and whichever party had its prayers answered should follow the other, to which Ṣāliḥ acquiesced. While the majority of the tribe's members simply prayed to their idols that none of Ṣāliḥ's prayers be answered, they demanded that Ṣāliḥ bring them a pregnant she-camel out of a rock (or hill) as a token of his truthfulness. No sooner had Ṣāliḥ finished his prayer than the rock (or hill) they had designated split open, and a huge pregnant she-camel came out of it in the way they had prescribed for him. After complying with their conditions, Ṣāliḥ told them that the she-camel was to feed freely from "God's earth," and that no one was "to touch her ... with hurt lest painful torment seize you." Furthermore, the use of the well's water, which may have been their sole water source, was to alternate between the tribe and the she-camel on a daily basis. Our exegetes add, however, that, on the days when the tribe's members had no access to the well's water, they could drink its milk, which it produced profusely and gave willingly to them. The amount of milk this she-camel produced, our exegetes note, was so abundant that it was sufficient for the entire tribe. Furthermore, the tribe's members were allowed to store water for the day when they had no access to the well.

Although many of the tribe's members were persuaded of the truth of Ṣāliḥ's message and decided to follow him, many others remained averse to this message, and a third group displayed faith, yet continued to harbor ill will against him. One day, a group of the disbelievers needed water with which they wanted to mix their alcoholic beverages but realized that they had no access to it because it was the she-camel's day, at which point they decided to kill both it and its calf. Once they did, all those who actively participated in the crime as well as those who tacitly approved of it were destroyed within three days. In another version of the story, we are told that, when the she-camel was killed, the calf climbed a hill and asked, "God, where is my mother?" As a result, it was either lifted up (to heaven) or entered a rock, but the punishment was still inflicted on the crime's perpetrators in answer to its prayer.

Foltz finds in the she-camel story a "Qur'anic basis" for the "the right of thirst' (*ḥaqq al-shurb*)," which Islamic law accords to nonhuman animals, and which he considers to be one of the fields in which Islamic law

surpasses modern laws of the United States.⁹ Although this could be one of the conclusions drawn from this story, it seems to me that more can be construed from it. Perhaps the most obvious conclusion is that the she-camel's interests mattered so much to God that almost an entire tribe was destroyed to avenge it. One could still argue that the real cause of this punishment was disobedience to God, which happened in this particular case to take the form of assaulting the she-camel. Although this may be true, it is still noteworthy that God did not overlook His right of obedience and did not spare the supposedly better species just because this assault was directed against an inferior one. This position can be sensed even more in the version of the exegetical commentary on this story in which the calf's distress at losing its mother was immediately acknowledged and its prayer immediately answered. It is also noteworthy that the Qur'an refers to this she-camel as "the camel of God" and commends the Thamūd tribe to let it "feed in God's earth." This point gives more weight to the suggestion that, even though the Qur'an states that everything on earth is created for humans (2/al-Baqara: 29), it is not created for humans only. Ultimately, such statements seem to indicate, the earth belongs to God, and therefore all His creatures have their share in it. Finally, it is possible to see in this story substantiation for the view that the concept of *istikhlāf* is not meant to lift the status of humans over that of nonhuman animals. In this story, the tribe of Thamūd is destroyed (thus reaching the end of its succession or *istikhlāf*) because of their assault on one or two nonhuman animals.

Signs of creation

The Qur'an frequently invites people to reflect upon different creatures and natural phenomena with the aim of highlighting these as signs of divine attributes and truth, a theme that led to the writing of works such as al-Jāhīz's *K. al-Ḥayawān* and al-Majlisī's *Tawḥīd al-Mufaḍḍal*. Although humans are sometimes invited to reflect on the creation of animals in general (including their own species), the verses that triggered the exegetes to discuss animals as signs of creation in more detail are the ones pointing to specific animal species or even to the more restricted level of specific features or behaviors that are characteristic of certain species. The animal species or categories that are specifically selected for

⁹ Richard Foltz, "This She-Camel is a Sign to You': Dimensions of Animals in Islamic Tradition and Muslim Culture," *A Communion of Subjects* (see footnote 5 in Introduction), 153.

the purpose of reflection in the Qur'an are camels, *an'ām*, bees, birds, and human beings.

The two main elements in these animals to which the exegetes continually draw attention are paradox and blessings. With the first, they usually point to the presence of two given characteristics, which, in principle, should be mutually exclusive, or at least, which are not expected to function harmoniously together, although in reality they do. With the element of blessing, on the other hand, it is noted that awe-inspiring phenomena are simultaneously beneficial. Even though both elements are expected to induce reflection on the part of humans, it seems that the element of paradox is expected to trigger mostly rational contemplation, whereas the element of blessings is expected to trigger emotional responses of gratitude and thankfulness. In addition to these two elements, attention is sometimes drawn to the elements of perfection and complexity in the creation of animals, which are supposed to be signs of God's own perfection and also certain truths.

Camels. Because camels are among the few animals to which the Qur'an draws specific attention in their role as signs, our exegetes developed a wide spectrum of justifications for this particular selection, ranging from seemingly random reasons to extremely deliberate ones. When it is argued that the choice of camels for this role is deliberate, this is justified not only with reasons that are particular to this animal species, but also with circumstantial explanations that are independent of it, such as the environment where camels live or the people who are most familiar with them.

RANDOM CHOICE OF CAMELS. Sura 88/al-Ghāshiya contains an invitation for reflection upon four different signs, the first of which is the creation of camels. It says, "Will they not regard the camels, how they are created" (88/al-Ghāshiya: 17)? Although this invitation made the four consulted exegetes seek out features in the descriptive anatomy and behavior of camels that are particularly arresting, al-Rāzī, in addition to this, points out that the citation of camels in this context can be as good as the citation of any other creature because any creature fulfills the role of being a sign of creation in two different ways: first through the perfection or excellence of its making, which applies to all of God's creation, and second through its need for an external factor so that it be brought into existence and continue to exist thereafter. In this respect, al-Rāzī maintains, all creatures fulfill this function equally. However, because mentioning each single one of them is impossible as a result of their large number, it

becomes sufficient to mention only one or a few of them (R31: 142–3). Therefore, in this interpretation, camels are chosen randomly and not for any special characteristics that may make them unique.

CIRCUMSTANTIAL JUSTIFICATION. It is also suggested that the reason for drawing attention specifically to the creation of camels in this sura is because of the important role they play in the lives of Arabs (IK14: 333), which resulted in an emotional attachment to them and intimate knowledge of their different states. About this, al-Rāzī says, “This animal had the strongest impact on the hearts of the Arabs, to the point that they made the blood price of someone who is killed be paid in camels, and when an Arab king wanted to reward a poet lavishly he would give him a hundred camels” (R31: 143). He also says: “Arabs were the most knowledgeable about camels in their states of health and sickness and benefits and harms, which makes it appropriate for the All-Wise to command them (Arabs) to specifically reflect upon this animal” (R31: 144). Al-Qurṭubī also points out that, when it was suggested to al-Ḥasan (al-Baṣrī, d. 110/728) that elephants would have been a better choice than camels as they were even more amazing, he answered that elephants belonged to the remote past of Arabs (meaning that Arabs had already forgotten about them), which was not the case with camels (Q20: 25), whence comes the suggestion that the choice of camels for this function may have been based on environmental circumstances.

Al-Rāzī and al-Qurṭubī find another contextual reason for the selection of camels, which fits with the other three signs mentioned in this sura, namely the sky, mountains, and the land. Al-Rāzī says,

The Qur'an was revealed in the language of the Arabs, who used to travel frequently [in search of pasture] as their land was barren. Most of their traveling was done on camels, and the Arabs used to travel in the empty deserts, away from people. Usually, when someone is alone and has no one to talk to and nothing to occupy his hearing or his sight, he occupies himself with reflection. When the traveling Arab starts this reflection, the first thing on which his sight falls is the camel he is riding, which is an amazing creature. If he looks up he sees the sky. If he looks at his sides he sees the mountains, and if he looks down he sees the land. It is as if God has commanded him to reflect specifically upon these items when he is alone and away from others, so that feelings of arrogance and envy would not distract him from abstract reflection. Since these are the only things he is able to see while in the desert, it is no wonder that God brought these four signs together in the same sura. (R31: 144, see also Q20: 26)

In this interpretation, therefore, camels are not selected for any particular reasons that make them exceptionally worthy of reflection, but rather

because of the role they happen to play in the lives of Arabs as their main means of transportation.

Along the same lines, al-Rāzī also proposes a justification for the selection of camels that does not necessarily point to anything special about them or even points to a negative aspect he seems to perceive in them. He says,

Although all creatures are equal signs of God's existence, they can still be divided into two categories. The first consists of creatures that simultaneously possess features that trigger reflection and lead to wise thought, and features that make them objects of [human] desire. The second consists of creatures that have features which trigger reflection yet do not possess qualities that may make them objects of desire. Examples of the first category are beautiful human beings, gardens, gold, and silver. All of these are signs of creation, yet because they are objects of desire, God did not command people to reflect on them specifically, since there is no guarantee that once one engages in this process motives of desire would not overwhelm the motives of wisdom, which would hinder reflection and become a reason for increased love for these things. As for the second category, it consists of creatures that have no beauty in them and the constitution of which points to the infinite wisdom of their Creator, such as camels and other animals. Since Arabs were closer to camels in their daily lives, as was the case also with the sky, the land and mountains, it became more appropriate to choose these specific four signs. (R31: 144–5)

In this opinion, what makes camels an appropriate choice is that they lack beauty, which makes them a safer sign: Camels may trigger reflection among humans, however, they themselves appear defective, a view that seems to downgrade rather than elevate the status of camels. Elsewhere, however, al-Rāzī affirms that one of the elements that makes camels special is the beauty which is found in them “when you bring them home, and when you take them out to pasture” (R19: 182). As mentioned, he also affirms that camels have a very strong impact on the hearts of the Arabs, which points to a contradiction in the presentation of his views. Al-Rāzī's point may be that camels themselves are not physically attractive, yet they may be loved for the function they fulfill in Arabs' lives. Their physical unattractiveness would allow them to be more appropriate for the object of reflection, but even if this was indeed his opinion, it still remains difficult to disregard the emotional impact resulting from their importance in Arabs' lives, which al-Rāzī himself affirms.

Deliberate choice of camels

ELEMENT OF STRENGTH. Al-Rāzī, like the other three exegetes, proposes another set of interpretations that point to the specific characteristics of

camels that may have led to their selection. Among the particularly arresting features in camels to which he and the other three exegetes point is that, unlike any other animal, camels are loaded while on their knees, and thanks to their great strength they are capable of standing up while carrying their loads. Al-Ṭabari's comment on this is that "the One Who created [such a creature] would not find it difficult to create the things He described both in heaven and in hellfire" (Ṭ12: 556). Therefore, this feature in camels in his opinion is an indication of the divine attribute of omnipotence. In another opinion, this skill in camels could be a sign of one particular feature in heaven. It is maintained that when God revealed the verse "Wherein are couches raised" (88/al-Ghāshiyā: 13), the disbelievers challenged the Prophet, asking how it would be possible to climb such couches. So, in these exegetes' opinions, God drew their attention to the familiar scene in which camels kneel down to allow humans to load and climb on them and then rise (Q20: 24).

ELEMENT OF PARADOX. In this context, the four exegetes reiterate the theme of the miraculous aspect of camels' subjugation and amenability to riders who are significantly weaker than them, which they take as a clear sign of God's existence. Ibn Kathīr, who starts by asserting that camels are "astonishing creatures with amazing constitutions," cites that "among their particularly extraordinary features is that despite their extreme strength they are still amenable to weak leaders [humans], allowing them to put heavy loads on their backs" (IK14: 333). Similarly, al-Rāzī states that "despite the fact that camels are extremely powerful, they differ from other animals in that they are extremely amenable to the weakest animal, i.e. a small child" (R31: 143). Al-Qurṭubī considers the subjugation of "a great creature" to "a small one" an astounding element that should be taken as a sign of creation (Q20: 24). Therefore, what the exegetes find impressive in the case of camels is not only their remarkable strength, but also the paradoxical element found in the obedience of such a strong creature to a weaker one. The discussion of this theme confirms that from our exegetes' perspective the point of subjugating camels is to show God's power, and not humans' distinction, as humans continue to be portrayed as in fact too weak to deal with camels without divine assistance.

ELEMENT OF BLESSINGS. Another reason for the specific selection of camels in this *sura* in the opinions of al-Rāzī, al-Qurṭubī, and ibn Kathīr is the comprehensive nature of the benefits they provide for humans. A camel can be used as a means of transportation, its milk serves to quench one's

thirst, its flesh to satisfy one's hunger, and its hair to provide a number of textile items. Furthermore, al-Rāzī explains that in every single one of these benefits camels excel other animals. He explains that camels supply abundant amounts of milk, which can quench the thirst of a large number of people. They are thus, presumably, better than cows, whose main function is to produce milk. Similarly, their flesh can feed large crowds, which makes them better than sheep, which are mainly owned for the provision of meat. Camels can also traverse distances that cannot be covered by any other animal, because of qualities such as the capability to endure thirst, to be content with the types of fodder with which no other animal would be content (R31: 143). Al-Qurṭubī's comment on this is that "their blessings are more general and [God's] omnipotence in them is more manifest." Al-Qurṭubī also quotes al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī as saying that "God chose camels specifically [in this *sura*] because they eat pits, yet they produce milk." His point is that camels may cost their owners very little because they can live on the cheapest types of fodder, however, they provide milk, which is nutritious and valuable. Therefore, al-Ḥasan attributes their selection to the combination of the beneficial aspect with the element paradox. Likewise, when the suggestion was made to al-Ḥasan about elephants being more wondrous than camels, he protested that elephants "are like pigs, since their flesh cannot be eaten. Also, since you can neither ride nor milk them" (Q20: 25),¹⁰ the element of blessings becomes a crucial criterion in the selection of camels.

IMAGINATIVE FACULTY. Another reason al-Rāzī offers as a justification for the selection of camels in this *sura* is their strong imaginative ability. Offering a personal anecdote, he relates how being lost in the desert, a camel helped him and his companions find their way back. "We were amazed at its strong imaginative faculty (*quwwat takhayyul*) and how the images of all those turns were kept in its memory in a way that a group of rational creatures were unable to do," al-Rāzī comments (R31: 143). Perhaps, the reason behind al-Rāzī's amazement is the paradox he noticed between camels' developed memories and his own presumption of their lack of intelligence. This theme (nonhuman animals' imaginative faculty or strong memory) is in fact quite developed in Islamic and Arabic writings. This shows how closely Muslims observed other species and how fascinated they were by their various skills. This attitude, of course,

¹⁰ This suggests that al-Ḥasan was not aware that Indians rode elephants or that he tacitly affirmed that elephants are not meant to be used for transportation.

can be partly accounted for by the agrarian nature of premodern societies, which allowed Muslims to interact with and observe other animals closely. However, closeness to other animals is not the only reason. As noted, one of Waldau's complaints about Buddhism, which similarly belongs to an agrarian milieu, is that, despite the heavy presence of nonhuman animals in its texts, attitudes toward them are "not based on extensive knowledge of other animals" which, in his opinion, indicates that "early Buddhists were unconcerned with exploring the actual realities of other animals."¹¹ I think that by presenting animals as signs of creation the Qur'an played a key role in encouraging Muslims to observe them closely.

An'ām

ELEMENT OF PARADOX. The Qur'an also invites people to give special thought to *an'ām* or, more specifically, to one aspect in their creation, which is the production of milk in their bellies. It says, "And in the cattle there is a lesson for you. We give you to drink of that which is in their bellies, from betwixt the refuse and the blood, pure milk palatable to the drinkers" (16/al-Naḥl: 66). As in the case of camels, among the principle factors that make this phenomenon worthy of mention in the opinion of the four exegetes are the two elements of paradox and blessing. Ibn Kathīr, al-Qurṭubī, and al-Rāzī offer anatomical analyses that explain how pure and palatable milk is produced in the same vessel along with impure blood and excrement without being adulterated by them (R20: 53–4; Q10: 82–3; IK8: 323–4). Al-Qurṭubī comments on this phenomenon by citing another Qur'anic verse, "Effective wisdom; but warnings avail not" (54/al-Qamar: 5), to express his amazement that a sign which he finds tremendously clear is lost on many people.

Furthermore, al-Qurṭubī notices another element of paradox, applying to *an'ām* themselves and not to the milk they produce. In his opinion, "among the greatest lessons" is that an "innocent" creature (presumably the word *an'ām* is again taken to mean camels only) carries a "sinful" one (i.e., the human being) (Q10: 81). While all four exegetes express their amazement at the fact that camels or riding animals in general carry humans, the source of their amazement is the element of paradox they see in the fact that a stronger creature is controlled by a weaker one. The paradox to which al-Qurṭubī points out here, however, has a moral stamp. It presents camels not simply as the strong yet dumb creatures that are put

¹¹ Paul Waldau, "Buddhism and Animal Rights" in *Contemporary Buddhist Ethics*, ed. Damien Keown (Richmond: Curzon Press, 2000), 98.

at the service of the physically weaker yet more intelligent human beings; camels possess the moral quality of innocence, which stands in contrast to the moral imperfection or sinfulness that is attributed to humans in this context. Another thought-provoking phenomenon to which al-Qurṭubī points in his discussion of this verse is the obedience of *an'ām* to their owners or lords versus humans' rebellion against their Lord, which makes *an'ām*, once again, better than (many) humans (Q10: 81).

ELEMENT OF BLESSINGS. The element of blessings is particularly emphasized by al-Qurṭubī, who quotes a ḥadīth in which the Prophet is reported to have said:

When one of you eats a [type] of food, let him/her say: "God bless it for us and feed us with [even] better food than this!" But when one of you drinks milk, let him/her say: "God bless it for us and give us more of it!" for it is the only thing that can substitute for [all] foods and drinks.¹²

Al-Qurṭubī comments on this saying, "our scholars wonder how this would not be the case when milk constitutes the first food item that nourishes the human being, allowing his/her body to grow. It is indeed nourishment that is free from imperfections and it is the sustenance of bodies" (Q10: 84). Another blessed aspect of milk that al-Qurṭubī mentions is the fact that God made it a sign of the guidance of the Muslim *umma* because, when on the Night of the Heavenly Journey, the Prophet was offered wine and milk to choose from, he chose milk. The Angel Gabriel commented on this saying: "you [Muḥammad] have opted for the natural [human] disposition. Had you chosen wine, your nation would have gone astray."¹³ Al-Qurṭubī's last comment on the blessed aspect of milk is "that when one prays to have more of it, one indeed prays for more prosperity, for milk is a sign of fertility, riches and blessings." He concludes by affirming that "All of it is blessed!" (Q10: 84). Because the Qur'an presents *an'ām* as a source of this blessed substance, the intention is perhaps to extend this blessedness to them.

ELEMENTS OF COMPLEXITY AND SUBTLETY. Al-Rāzī points also to the element of complexity and subtlety, noticed in the digestive operation that leads to the making of milk as a clear indication not only of God's existence, but also of a number of divine attributes, such as mercy, wisdom, and perfection (R20: 55). He offers a detailed anatomical explanation of

¹² Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan*, no. 3732.

¹³ Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, no. 3430.

this process, highlighting its subtleties, the adaptability of the organs to different situations depending on the need of animal bodies, and the wisdom behind each single detail in it. He also points to infants' (and other small animals') innate capability of suckling mothers' milk so that this complex process achieves the ultimate desired result (R20: 54–5).

In al-Rāzī's discussion, the different phases in the creation of milk show that resurrection is logically possible. He says:

Grass, which animals eat, comes from soil and water. The Creator of the world devises a plan in accordance with which clay is turned into plants and grass. When animals eat grass, he devises another plan in compliance with which grass is turned into blood, which is turned into milk. Milk can be turned into cheese and butter. This proves that God is capable of turning these bodies from one state to another. This being the case, it is not impossible that He bring back to the scattered parts of corpses attributes of life and consciousness, which proves that Resurrection and the Judgment Day are [logically] possible. (R20: 55)

Bees

THE QUR'AN SAYS:

And your Lord inspired the bee, [saying]: Choose habitations in the hills and in the trees and that which they thatch; Then eat of all fruits, and follow the ways of your Lord, made smooth [for you]. There comes forth from their bellies a drink diverse of hues, wherein is healing for humankind. Herein is indeed a sign for people who reflect. (16/al-Nahl: 68–9)

As usual, the consulted exegetes emphasize the elements of paradox and blessing that make bees, their behavior, honey, and honeycombs signs of creation. Ibn Kathīr finds these two elements (paradox and blessings) in “God's inspiration to this animal, which despite its frail structure, follows rough paths, picks its food from all sorts of fruits, and makes honey and wax.” In his opinion, these acts are food for thought for “people who reflect on the greatness of the Creator, Commander, and Subjugator of these animals; thus they can conclude that He is the Planner, the Omnipotent, the Wise, the Knowledgeable, the Generous, and the Merciful” (IK8: 329). Al-Ṭabarī finds honey with its healing characteristic a sign worthy of reflection, for it should lead one to think “of the One who subdued these bees, guided them to eat from specific fruits, take habitation in mountains, trees and thatches and made honey come from their bellies” (T7: 614–5). These exegetes find it inconceivable that a bee would be able to recognize the right fruits, find the right paths, and produce honey if it had to do all of this without receiving external guidance. Al-Qurṭubī says, “Unbiased reflection and deep thought would lead one to conclude with

certainly that bees mastered these subtle skills despite their frail structure thanks to God" (Q10: 92). Therefore, the disproportion between the bee's frail structure and what it can achieve is a sign that God is behind this complex process. Al-Qurṭubī finds another paradoxical element that applies to honey. He quotes the Prophet's cousin 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, who, in an attempt to minimize the value of worldly life, says in allusion to both honey and silk that "the noblest of humans' foods is a bee's vomit, and the noblest of their clothing is a worm's saliva." Although al-Qurṭubī is not certain that honey comes from the bee's stomach through its mouth, he still asserts that it is formed inside its belly, which points to the impurity of honey's origin in contrast with its superiority as a food item (Q10: 89). The beehive's wonderful structure is another sign of divine perfection. Al-Qurṭubī quotes the Andalusian exegete ibn al-'Arabī (d. 543/1148), who affirms that the hexagonal shape found in honeycombs is the only geometrical shape that allows such tightness in a building so as to leave no gaps between the parts (Q10: 89).¹⁴ Another element of paradox to which al-Rāzī points is that with one end of its body the bee produces honey, whereas with the other it stings. This contrast is even reflected at a linguistic level, for if one reverses the letters of the word 'asal (honey) one gets the verb *lasa'* (to sting, R2: 92). Like *An'ām*, therefore, bees are at once signs of blessings (in their capacity as producers of honey) and of thought-provoking paradoxical phenomena. According to these discussions, observing them closely could potentially reveal aspects of God's mercy and majesty.

Birds. Birds are worthy of contemplation mostly because of their capacity to fly. The same elements of paradox and benefit characterize this wondrous phenomenon (flying), however, in this case the benefits appear to be limited to birds. The Qur'an says, "Have they not seen the birds above them spreading out their wings and closing them? Nothing upholds them save the Beneficent. He is Seer of all things" (67/al-Mulk: 19); and "Have they not seen the birds obedient in mid-air? None holds them save God. Herein, verily, are signs for people who believe" (16/al-Naḥl: 79). In his commentary on 16/al-Naḥl: 79, al-Rāzī says, "God has given birds wings which they can spread out and close ... He also created the air with a subtle and penetrable nature. If it were not for these two elements, flying would not have been possible" (R20: 73). In

¹⁴ Ibn al-'Arabī, *Aḥkām al-Qur'an*, 3: 136.

al-Rāzī's opinion, the element of paradox in the phenomenon of flying consists of the noncompliance of the mass of the bird's body with the regular laws of gravity. He says, "Birds' bodies consist of a mass which in principle should hinder them from staying in the air without a prop to support them from the bottom and without straps to suspend them from the top. Therefore, birds are capable of remaining in the open air because God holds them up" (R20: 73). Furthermore, the fact that God holds birds in the open space, in ibn Kathīr's opinion, is an indication of His mercy. He says, "(God) subjugated the air to them, out of mercy and benevolence." Ibn Kathīr says also that God knows what benefits every creature. Therefore, one of the divine attributes of which the "wondrous" flying phenomenon is an indication is divine mercy toward birds and by extension, toward all creatures (IK14: 76).

Human beings. Humans are often invited to ponder their own creation in the Qur'an. For example, in surat al-Ṭāriq (86: 5), it is said: "So let the human being (*al-insān*) consider from what he is created." Surat al-Ḥajj (22: 5) contains a more detailed invitation. It says:

O humankind (*yā ayyuhā al-nās*)! if you are in doubt concerning the Resurrection, then [know that] We have created you from dust, then from a drop of seed, then from a clot, then from a little lump of flesh shapely and shapeless, that We may make [it] clear for you. And We cause what We will to remain in the wombs for an appointed time, and afterward We bring you forth as infants, then [give you growth] that you attain your full strength. And among you there is he who dies [young], and among you there is he who is brought back to the most abject time of life, so that, after knowledge, he knows naught. And you see the earth barren, but when We send down water thereon, it thrills and swells and puts forth every lovely kind [of growth].

The Qur'an also says, "We shall show them [human beings] Our signs on the horizons and within themselves until it will be manifest unto them that it is the Truth" (41/Fuṣṣilat: 53). Clearly, then, humans are treated as signs of creation in this scripture.

In our exegetes' discussions, humans' function as a sign of creation is founded on the same elements of paradox, blessings, and perfection and serves to prove God's existence and other attributes as well as the logical possibility of resurrection. Among the explanations that al-Qurṭubī offers, for example, verse 41: 53 hints "to [God's] subtle making and the meticulous attention to details [in the creation of the human being]. This meticulousness extends even to urine and feces, for a man eats and drinks

from one orifice [the mouth], yet excretions are sorted out and leave the body from two different orifices" (Q15: 244). Another element of contrast is perceivable in the creation of the eyes, "which are merely two drops of water, yet they can cross [instantly] the distance between earth and the sky, a distance that may take up to 500 years if one were to cross it walking." Humans, therefore, like all other animals and creatures, carry in themselves the same paradoxical phenomena that, upon reflection, can lead them to the same conclusions about God's existence. Furthermore, these paradoxical phenomena point to God's mercy. For example, the two drops of water (the eyes) allow humans to travel cosmic distances effortlessly.

Al-Rāzī's discussion of 22/al-Ḥajj: 5 (the different stages in humans' creation) recalls in many ways his discussion of the formation of milk in *an'ām*'s bellies. This verse, al-Rāzī explains, mentions seven stages in the creation of the human being, starting with dust, which is turned into a drop of seed, and so forth. He says: "it is as if God says here, 'I am the one who has turned solid dust (*al-turāb al-yābis*) into subtle water (*mā' laṭīf*), although there is no correspondence between the two elements at all.'" The point of the enumeration of these stages, as is the case with description of the creation of milk, is also to prove that resurrection is logically possible, for "how can the One who causes such transformations to take place in this life be unable to resurrect humans" (R23: 8–10)? As signs of creation, therefore, humans do not differ from any other creature.

These animals are fit to function as signs in the Qur'an because of some features that are presented as leading, upon reflection, to certain theological conclusions. Among these, the element of paradox is perhaps the most important. When this element is noticed in a certain phenomenon or creature, such as the production of honey by a small and frail insect, or the production of white and palatable milk in the same vessel that contains blood and excrement, the paradox is supposed to instigate humans to reflect upon the external factor that makes such things possible. Therefore, in the exegetes' opinions, paradox is generally a sign of God's existence. It can also be an indication of His omnipotence, for the One who can make such contradictory elements function harmoniously and smoothly must possess tremendous power. Another important feature found in these signs is the element of blessing, which in many cases is associated with the element of paradox. The beneficial aspect of these signs is supposed to be an indication of God's infinite benevolence, mercy, and generosity. Occasionally the exegetes point also to the perfection of these animals' creation, which they take as a sign of divine perfection. Finally, the element of transformation, found especially in the

formation of milk and the various stages in humans' creation, can be a sign of resurrection.

Inside the world of nonhuman animals

The preceding themes, especially the ones concerning animals in relation to God and as signs of creation, deal mainly with external aspects of nonhuman animals, especially their status and worth from a divine perspective as interpreted by the exegetes and their physical or anatomical characteristics. Therefore, they are hardly informative about the Qur'anic depiction of the psychological makeup of nonhuman animals or what actually goes on in their minds. As has already been pointed out on a number of occasions, however, the Qur'an ascribes to nonhuman animals several characteristics, which are not usually confirmed by human senses. The most prominent of these is a spiritual dimension in which the entire universe partakes. Although the nature of nonhuman animals' spirituality is the subject of controversy, the exegetes never question the principle itself. The most intriguing animal themes in the Qur'an, however, occur in a *sura* titled after a small insect, the *sura* of al-Naml (Ants), which, despite the brevity of the passage that it dedicates to nonhuman animals, still allows us to have a glimpse inside aspects of certain animals' minds and psychology from a Qur'anic standpoint. In this *sura*, we hear some nonhuman animals' voices, and we are introduced to their perspectives. This quick look inside the minds of certain animals reveals that, according to the Qur'an, they can be moral beings capable of making choices and also held accountable for those choices. The theme of nonhuman animals' accountability is also suggested in the context of animals' resurrection. Although there are attempts to minimize these animal themes by limiting them to the few individual animals quoted in the Qur'an, the mere fact that the Qur'an presents things from an ant's perspective or that it informs us about a hoopoe's views on political, social, and religious matters that apply not to hoopoes but rather to humans is highly significant.

In this section, I will first discuss nonhuman animals' spirituality and the different understandings of this phenomenon. I will then move to themes that highlight even further the complexity of (certain?) nonhuman animals, such as language, morality, inspiration, resurrection, accountability, and perspective. Finally, I will propose an assessment of our exegetes' views on these topics, mainly with the aim of highlighting their ambivalent, and sometimes even contradictory, approaches to certain Qur'anic animal themes.

Spirituality

Nonhuman animals, or at least certain species thereof, are individually discussed in the Qur'an in terms of spirituality on just a few occasions (16/al-Nahl: 49; 21/al-Anbyā': 79; 22/al-Ḥajj: 18; and 24/al-Nūr: 41). However, all of them are obviously included among the countless number of creatures, animate and inanimate, that constantly worship God. The Qur'an mentions a few forms of active and passive worship in which the so-called nonrational creatures partake, such as *tasbiḥ* (praise/glorification of God), *sujūd* (prostration), and fear of or submission to God (*khashya*), and some of the exegetes even include ritual prayers (*ṣalāt*), fasting (*ṣawm*), and even self-sacrifice for the sake of God in these creatures' forms of worship. Although none of these creatures are denied the spiritual dimension ascribed to them by the Qur'an, our exegetes differ greatly on the nature of this spirituality.

Tasbiḥ (glorification/praise of God). Our exegetes hold two major views on the nature of nonrational creatures' praise of God: The first is active and linguistic, containing glorification formulae similar to that of human language; the second is passive and excludes any form of consciousness and language and seems to be more compatible with the human idea of what are considered nonrational beings. The Qur'an says that "The seven heavens and the earth and all that is therein praise Him, and there is not a thing but hymns His praise; but you do not understand their praise. He is ever Clement, Forgiving" (17/al-Isrā': 44). In his commentary on this verse, ibn Kathīr says that all these creatures "exalt, glorify, extol and praise God, and testify to His oneness in lordship and divinity" (IK9: 15). In ibn Kathīr's view, nonhuman being's worship of God is a complex phenomenon that may even be ritualistic, because it involves ritualistic prayers (*ṣalāt*), as opposed to invocations or simple prayers (*du'ā'*, IK13: 471). It also seems to involve language and awareness of a number of God's attributes, such as His oneness and exaltedness (IK9: 16). Ibn Kathīr attributes humans' incapability to understand other creatures' hymning praises to the fact that these creatures' languages are different from human ones. He also cites a number of traditions in which the Prophet and some of his companions are reported to have heard and understood the *tasbiḥ* of many inanimate and animate nonhuman beings (IK9: 16–20). Therefore, this worship as presented by ibn Kathīr recalls human worship first in its complexity; second, in its being a conscious practice; and third, in its use of language, which, in spite of its difference from human languages, is intelligible to some human beings on exceptional occasions.

Al-Ṭabarī's presentation of the so-called nonrational creatures' *tasbīḥ* is similar to ibn Kathīr's, however, in some of the opinions he reports only living creatures practice active or conscious *tasbīḥ*, whereas inanimate beings do not. Therefore, whether in his or in the other opinions that he reports, nonhuman animals and even living plants are consistently among the creatures that practice active *tasbīḥ*, which involves forms of language and consciousness. Al-Ṭabarī quotes a ḥadīth in which the Prophet is reported to have told his companions, "Shall I inform you of something [the Prophet] Noah taught to his son? He taught him to say: 'Praise and glory be to God,' (*subḥān Allāh wa-bi-ḥamdih*) for this is the prayer and the praise formula which is hymned by all creatures (*fa-innahā ṣalātu al-khalā'iq*)." ¹⁵ Al-Ṭabarī also cites a tradition attributed to the early exegete 'Ikrima (d. 105/723) in which he is reported to have said, "Let none of you deride his riding animal or his clothes, for everything glorifies God" (Ṭ8: 85). ¹⁶ Neither al-Ṭabarī nor ibn Kathīr elaborates extensively on the nature of these creatures' *tasbīḥ*, and in many cases they only quote or paraphrase the Qur'anic verses or the ḥadīths that deal with this topic. Despite this lack of elaboration (or because of it), it is clear that both of them accept the literal meaning of *tasbīḥ*.

Al-Qurṭubī and al-Rāzī elaborate on the theme of the so-called non-rational creatures' *tasbīḥ* and propose different ways of understanding this phenomenon. Al-Qurṭubī cites two major types of *tasbīḥ*, which are *tasbīḥ al-ḥaqīqa*, or real *tasbīḥ*, and *tasbīḥ al-dalāla*, or the *tasbīḥ* of indication. *Tasbīḥ al-ḥaqīqa* is the same as the one established by ibn Kathīr and al-Ṭabarī, as it involves language articulated by the creatures that practice it and their awareness of this practice. Those who advocate this opinion, al-Qurṭubī informs us, support their view with the part of the verse that says, "but you understand not their praise." In their opinion, "it would have been acceptable to interpret this *tasbīḥ* figuratively, had it not been specifically pointed out in the verse that these creatures' *tasbīḥ* is generally unintelligible [to humans]" (Q10: 173). Therefore, for them this must be a verbally expressed *tasbīḥ*, however, humans are incapable of deciphering it. In contrast with *tasbīḥ al-ḥaqīqa*, *tasbīḥ al-dalāla* simply consists of every creature's state of calling attention to its Creator. In this groups' opinion, every "created

¹⁵ Ibn Abi Shayba, *Muṣannaf ibn Abi Shayba* (Riadh: Maktabat al-Rushd, 1988), no. 29425.

¹⁶ Ibn Abi al-Dunyā, *Kitāb hawāṭif al-jimmān* (Beirut, Dimashq, 'Ammān: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1995), 121–2.

thing, just by existing, testifies that God is its creator and that He is omnipotent" (Q10: 173). Therefore, this *tasbīḥ* consists of the capability of all created things of occasioning (verbal?) *tasbīḥ* among rational beings once the latter are guided to theological conclusions based on the function of these creatures as signs of creation. Advocates of this opinion, al-Qurṭubī continues to explain, face a difficulty: The verse states that nonhuman creatures' *tasbīḥ* is generally unintelligible to humans, a description that apparently does not correspond to *tasbīḥ al-dalāla*, which appears to be easily accessible to humans. This group is not bothered by this difficulty; they explain that the inability to interpret other creatures' *tasbīḥ* applies only to the disbelievers, "who are incapable of understanding God's signs and who do not give careful thought to what they see around them." Therefore, in this understanding, the so-called nonrational creatures' *tasbīḥ* is only a figurative one and excludes any possible dimension in them that is unknown to humans. Those who advocate this opinion justify it by the fact that these creatures have no consciousness, and therefore they find it inconceivable that inanimate things can practice literal or actual *tasbīḥ*.

Although al-Qurṭubī cites both opinions, he is fully convinced that all creatures' *tasbīḥ* belongs to the first category, that is, real *tasbīḥ*. He says, "The truth is that everything practices [real] *tasbīḥ* as this is corroborated by scriptural evidence ... It is a verbally articulated *tasbīḥ*, which involves life and language [even among inanimate creatures]. Since the Prophetic tradition has corroborated the literal meaning of what came in the Qur'an [regarding all creatures' *tasbīḥ*] then this is the more adequate interpretation" (Q10: 173–4).

Like al-Qurṭubī, al-Rāzī also mentions these two types of *tasbīḥ*, which he designates as *tasbīḥ bi-al-qawl* (verbal *tasbīḥ*, corresponding to al-Qurṭubī's *tasbīḥ al-ḥaqīqa*) and *tasbīḥ al-dalāla*. However, unlike al-Qurṭubī, he adopts the figurative meaning. Al-Rāzī begins his argument by establishing that the living creature who is *mukallaḥ* (required to follow the precepts of religion) practices *tasbīḥ* in two different ways. The first one is by way of language, when the *mukallaḥ* creature says: "Glory be to God!" and the second is by way of *dalāla*, or indication (explained earlier). As for those who are not *mukallaḥ*, such as nonhuman animals and inanimate things, they practice only the second type of *tasbīḥ* because the first type occurs only when a creature possesses rational faculties, knowledge, understanding, and language. All of this, al-Rāzī asserts, is inconceivable in the case of inanimate things (R20: 174–5).

Al-Rāzī supports his argument with both rational and scriptural proofs. For the rational one, he states that

If we accept that inanimate things possess knowledge and language, then possessing knowledge does not serve anymore as evidence to establish that God has the attribute of life. If we accept that inanimate things know God and praise him without being living creatures, then it becomes unnecessary for a being that is knowledgeable, omnipotent and possessing language to be living as well. But this is ignorance and blasphemy, for it is known necessarily (*ma'lūm bi-al-darūra*) that the one that has no life can have no power and no language. (R20: 175)¹⁷

Therefore, for al-Rāzī at least the attribute of knowledge (*ilm*) cannot be logically separated from the attribute of life because once we accept that knowledge is possible in the absence of life, it becomes imaginable that God could be knowledgeable without being living, which, in his opinion, is both ignorance and disbelief (*jahl wa-kufr*). Like ibn Ḥazm, al-Rāzī apparently will not conceive of a form of life or consciousness that would differ from our understanding of these concepts, an idea that our other three exegetes do not seem to consider farfetched.

As for the scriptural evidence, al-Rāzī finds corroboration for his opinion in the same verse (17/al-Isrā': 44), as do his opponents. Those who use this verse to establish the literal meaning of *tasbīḥ*, al-Rāzī maintains, claim that "the *tasbīḥ* discussed in this verse is unintelligible to humans, while *tasbīḥ al-dalāla* is indeed intelligible to them. Therefore, in their opinion, these creatures' *tasbīḥ* must be different from the one accessible to humans, namely *tasbīḥ al-dalāla*." Al-Rāzī's answer can be summed up in two points. First, in fact *tasbīḥ al-dalāla* is not fully available to humans, whether believers or disbelievers. Because this *tasbīḥ* consists of nonrational beings' ability to generate reflection among humans, hence leading the humans to practice (actual) *tasbīḥ*, then, if this type of *tasbīḥ* were to fulfill its function properly, humans would be required to reflect on every single created thing and to have full knowledge of all the existent things and all the details of the existence of each one of them. However, there is no limit to the things that can be known and on which one can reflect, and humans cannot possibly encompass all this knowledge to allow this kind of *tasbīḥ* to realize its full potential. Second, the disbelievers, even if they admit that the universe has a Creator, do not reflect on His creation to find out about His attributes (and hence abstain from the practice of this *tasbīḥ*). Al-Rāzī concludes that although *tasbīḥ al-dalāla* is in

¹⁷ Note also that al-Rāzī grants that on exceptional occasions God can (and does) create life and rationality even in inanimate things (R3: 120).

principle accessible to humans, it is not readily or easily so and definitely not so in its entirety as the advocates of the literal interpretation claim. Al-Rāzī's concluding argument is that because the last part of the verse mentions God's clemency and forgiveness, then the verse must be pointing to a kind of *tasbīh* that in principle is accessible to humans but which humans either do not understand, refuse to understand, or understand poorly. For otherwise, why should they be held accountable and then be forgiven for a type of knowledge that is totally outside their reach? In his opinion, the only *tasbīh* that fits this description is *tasbīh al-dalāla*, because the other type of *tasbīh*, if it truly existed among the so-called nonrational creatures, would be totally incomprehensible to humans, and there would be no reason for them either to be held accountable for not knowing it or to be forgiven for their failure to do so.

Therefore, al-Rāzī relies on two arguments to support his view that so-called nonrational creatures cannot conceivably practice actual *tasbīh*. One of these is the element of life, and the other is language with its accompanying features of knowledge and understanding. Al-Rāzī's view requires some analysis, however, this will be deferred until the discussion of nonhuman animals' language. At this point, it suffices to point out first that the life factor on which he bases his rational argument in granting *tasbīh al-dalāla* only to the so-called nonrational creatures works only in the case of inanimate beings and not in the case of nonhuman animals. In fact, as will be shown, al-Rāzī does not rule out the possibility of nonhuman animals' spirituality on logical grounds, but rather on the ground of *taklīf*, which ultimately rests on the basis of *ijmā'* (consensus of the *umma*). Therefore, nonhuman animals' spirituality and possession of language are not inherently inconceivable matters according to al-Rāzī's logic.

Second, al-Rāzī's argument is not fully consistent. In his opinion, humans cannot be fairly held accountable (then forgiven) for a type of *tasbīh* that is totally out of their reach. What makes this expectation unfair is the fact that because of its nature, *tasbīh al-ḥaqīqa* is totally out of the scope of humans: The language(s) in which this *tasbīh* is articulated do(es) not correspond to anything humans know. However, the type of alternative *tasbīh* (*tasbīh al-dalāla*) that he proposes is also out of the scope of humans, including the righteous, because of its size. Whereas the disbeliever or less pious may abstain from the practice of *tasbīh al-dalāla* because of their moral or religious shortcomings, for which, in al-Rāzī's view, it would be fair to expect them to answer, the more pious cannot practice this *tasbīh* properly (i.e., reflecting on every single created being)

because its sheer size places it out of their scope. Thus, if the mention of God's clemency and forgiveness in this verse serves to weaken the literal interpretation of this glorification, it can hardly be used to strengthen the second interpretation the way al-Rāzī presents it: Both types of *tasbiḥ* fall outside humans' capability – the first because of its nature, the second because of its size.

Although the four exegetes acknowledge that all animals without exception partake in the practice of *tasbiḥ* in one way or another, some animals are singled out from others in this respect. Among these, birds are mentioned explicitly in the Qur'an as glorifiers of God, once in 21/al-Anbiyā': 79, "And We subdued the hills and the birds to hymn [His] praise along with David," and another time in 24/al-Nūr: 41, "Have you not seen that God, He it is Whom all who are in the heavens and the earth praise, and the birds in their flight? Of each He knows verily the worship and the praise, and God is aware of what they do." In the case of 21/al-Anbiyā': 79, ibn Kathīr tells us that these birds praised God in response to the Prophet David's hymns of praise and because of the captivating beauty of his voice, which "whenever he hymned the praises of God, made the birds stand still in the air and respond to him" (IK9: 424). Ibn Kathīr also says that "the birds in the state of flying worship and hymn the praise of God using [formulae] of praise He taught to them and to which He guided them" (IK10: 256). Al-Qurṭubī reports an opinion stating that birds have a ritualistic prayer, although it does not involve bowing and prostration, as is the case with ritualistic prayers practiced by Muslim human beings. It is also suggested that birds' ritualistic prayers consist of the flapping of their wings (Q12: 189). Even al-Rāzī, who usually insists on understanding nonhuman animals and inanimate beings' spirituality in a figurative sense, concedes that the birds that worshipped God with the Prophet David did so in a literal sense. He says,

Verbal communication is not totally unimaginable in the case of birds. However, there is consensus among the *umma* that those who are required to observe the precepts of religion (*mukallaf*) are [only] the jinn, humans and angels. Birds do not possess the rational faculties that would lead to the imposition of such precepts on them. Nonetheless, even if birds are not *mukallaf*, they can still be commanded to do or prohibited from doing certain things, just like children. Therefore, these [birds'] praises of God are tantamount to a miracle, since they are raised to the level of adolescents as regards their level of understanding. (R22: 173)

Hence, even if al-Rāzī insists that in general birds (and other nonhuman animals) have no rational faculties, he is still ready to grant that on exceptional occasions they may possess some minimum language skills

and some understanding that is comparable to that of minor humans. This, however, remains in his opinion a miraculous and exceptional phenomenon that cannot be generalized.

Sujūd (prostration). On numerous occasions the Qur'an also mentions that all creatures, sometimes including even disbelievers, prostrate to God. The exegetes offer a wide spectrum of definitions for this concept to account for the different creatures' versions of it. Among the four consulted exegetes, ibn Kathir is the one who sticks closest to the literal meaning and avoids elaborating on this concept. Nonetheless, it is clear that he takes the prostration attributed in the Qur'an to all creatures to be a form of worship. In his interpretation of "Have you not seen that to God prostrates whosoever is in the heavens and whosoever is in the earth, and the sun, and the moon, and the stars, and the hills, and the trees, and the beasts, and many of humankind" (22/al-Ḥajj: 18), ibn Kathir quotes a ḥadīth in which the Prophet is reported to have prohibited Muslims from sitting unnecessarily on the backs of riding animals, for "a riding animal may be better than the person who rides it and may remember God more than the person riding it does" (IK10: 26).¹⁸ Because this ḥadīth does not explain the nature of nonhuman animals' prostration, it becomes obvious that the reason for citing it in this context is to serve as a reminder of the principle of nonhuman animals' spirituality.

Al-Ṭabarī takes the prostration of the so-called nonrational creatures mentioned in this verse to be simply the prostration or the inclination of their shadows (Ṭ9: 122). Al-Ṭabarī's interpretation is not without lexical or Qur'anic foundations. Lexically, he asserts that the meaning of the verb *sajada* (to prostrate) is also to turn. Additionally, the Qur'an says: "Have they not observed all things that God has created, how their shadows incline to the right and to the left, making prostration unto God, and they are lowly?" (16/al-Naḥl: 48), which links the practice of prostration to the turning of the shadows. About this, al-Ṭabarī reports a number of opinions, some stating that this prostration consists of the turning of the shadow itself, and others asserting rather that each creature has an actual prostration independent of its shadow. For example, he quotes al-Ḍaḥḥāk as saying that upon the turning of the shadow, all creatures fall down in prostration to God, and adds that al-Ḍaḥḥāk and his companions liked to pray at that time, as if to synchronize their worship with that of the rest of creatures (Ṭ7: 593). Therefore, al-Ḍaḥḥāk takes the prostration of

¹⁸ Aḥmad, *Musnad, al-Makkiyyin*, Sahl ibn Mu'adh ibn Anas al-Juhānī, no. 15629.

all creatures as something that occurs upon the turning of the shadow, and not as something that consists of the turning of the shadow itself.

Although al-Ṭabarī is more inclined to consider the prostration in which all creatures partake to be simply the turning of their shadows, clear indications in his discussion show that in his opinion this natural phenomenon, the turning of the shadow, is not void of spiritual significance. For example, he reports an opinion stating that “God made every creature He has brought down from the heavens worship Him, either willingly or unwillingly” (Ṭ11: 576). Another opinion that he reports states that “every star, sun, and moon in the skies falls in prostration when it sets, and rises again only when it is granted permission to do so,” hence indicating that the prostration of nonrational beings is a form of actual worship involving conscious behavior that is not traditionally attributed to them (Ṭ9: 122). Al-Ṭabarī, again, gives us no reason to think that he understands any of these concepts figuratively.¹⁹

The phenomenon of prostration acquires more meanings with al-Rāzī and al-Qurṭubī. In addition to the idea of turning mentioned earlier, both exegetes say that *sujūd* also means submission and resignation. In his discussion of the *sujūd* of the disbelievers, al-Qurṭubī says that this phenomenon consists of “the submissiveness and obedience to God’s planning and decrees in matters of strength and weakness, health and illness and beauty and ugliness” (Q12: 17). Al-Qurṭubī’s point seems to be that no creature has absolute control over its own self or destiny, and it is only God who determines the different states through which any creature passes. Therefore, in matters where there is no room for free choice, *sujūd* (which, here, is compliance with God’s decrees) takes over. Al-Rāzī establishes the same idea through a discussion of the compliance of the celestial bodies with God’s commands when they revolve in their orbits. Both exegetes also state that the simple fact of being in need of a Creator to be brought into existence is a form of *sujūd*. Another interpretation that al-Rāzī gives to the idea of *sujūd* of the shadows is that it is the simple movement of “falling down on and sticking to the ground, in a way that recalls the prostration of a human being” (R20: 35–6).

Although al-Rāzī’s and al-Qurṭubī’s definitions of *sujūd* are similar, their interpretation of the significance of the concepts of submission and resignation of all creatures to God are different. Al-Rāzī distinguishes

¹⁹ Although among the *falāsifa* such an idea may rest on the assumption that celestial spheres are animate beings with rational souls, this assumption does not seem to be shared here because al-Ṭabarī attributes this opinion to the first century exegete Abū al-‘Āliya al-Riyāḥī (d. 90 or 93/708 or 712).

between two types of *sujūd*: the *sujūd al-ʿibāda* and *sujūd al-inqiyād*. *Sujūd al-ʿibāda* is a form of active worship that corresponds to prostration as performed by Muslims (usually as part of ritual prayers) and angels. *Sujūd al-inqiyād*, on the other hand, simply consists of submission to or compliance with God's decrees. This type of *sujūd* is performed by all creatures (R20: 36). Just by making this distinction, al-Rāzī strips the *sujūd al-inqiyād* of any spiritual significance and insists that when the word applies to the so-called nonrational creatures, it consists only of automatic behavior according to natural laws that God has put into operation. Just as in the case of *tasbīḥ al-dalāla*, *sujūd al-inqiyād* hardly contains any idea of actual or conscious worship on the part of the creature that practices it.

Al-Qurṭubī's analysis, on the other hand, suggests that the gap between the two types of *sujūd* is insignificant or even nonexistent. He himself affirms that all things listen to and obey God (*al-ashyā'u kulluhā samī'a muṭī'a lillāh*; Q10: 74), which suggests a more interactive behavior between these creatures and God. He also quotes ibn al-Anbārī (d. 328/940), who maintains that the prostration of shadows is a conscious behavior because "shadows acquire minds with which they prostrate themselves in self-abasement to God, in the same way that mountains acquire minds to the point that they exchange speech" (Q9: 198–9).²⁰ Al-Qurṭubī does not fully agree with this opinion, as in an opinion that he attributes to al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1072), the possibility of shadows' acquisition of minds is questioned because "mountains are substances; therefore it is possible for them to acquire minds with which they submit themselves to God, provided that they acquire life. But shadows are accidents, therefore, it is unlikely that they acquire minds" (Q9: 199) However, the very refutation of the active prostration of shadows contains a confirmation that nonhuman animals may consciously submit themselves to God.²¹ Like al-Ṭabarī, he also quotes an opinion stating that all celestial bodies, upon setting, fall in prostration to God and remain in that posture until they obtain permission to rise again. Al-Qurṭubī comments on this by saying, "This is true prostration which requires the existence of

²⁰ This could be a reference to a tradition attributed to 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib, stating that the Prophet used to hear the greetings of inanimate beings (al-Tirmidhī, *Sunan al-Tirmidhī* [Cairo: Jam'īyyat al-Maknaz al-Islamī, 2001], no. 3630). It could also be a reference to 21/al-Anbiyā': 79.

²¹ Animals have "atomic" bodies that constitute substance in the context of *'ilm al-kalām*. The Ash'arite Qushayrī could also be saying that accidents cannot have accidents, and because minds are accidents, they cannot be acquired by shadows.

life and mind in the creature that performs it" (Q12: 17–8). Therefore, al-Qurṭubī explicitly states that conscious submission to God is a feature shared by all creatures.

Du‘ā’ (invocations). Al-Rāzī reports from Muḥammad al-Bāqir (possibly (d. 113/731),²² who asserts that in the morning, birds glorify God and ask Him for their sustenance (R24: 10). Although al-Rāzī himself rejects this opinion, he still allows us to know about another aspect of worship attributed to birds, which is *du‘ā’*, or invocations. In fact, in such opinions, birds’ worship of God is presented as multidimensional and interactive. Birds are portrayed as being aware not only of God’s attributes or of their own obedience to Him but also of other creatures’ worship, such as the Prophet David’s, which they deeply appreciated and in which they took part.

In the exegetical works, nonhuman animals’ prayers may even have an impact on human beings. In one anecdote, it is related that the Prophet Solomon once went out with some people to perform a rain prayer (*ṣalāt al-istisqā’*).²³ On their way they saw an ant lying on its back and raising its legs to the sky. Solomon could hear the ant saying, “God, we are among your creatures, and rain is indispensable for us. Without rain we will perish.” Solomon told his companions that they no longer needed to perform the prayer, for the ant’s prayer was sufficient (IK10: 398). In the Prophet Jonah’s story, the reason his people were spared severe punishment was that once they took his warnings seriously, they left their town accompanied by their children and domestic animals. “When they reached the desert,” ibn Kathīr says, “the humans prayed, the camels brayed, the cows mooed, and the sheep bleated until God forgave them” (IK9: 434). Although ibn Kathīr does not explicitly state that these domestic animals were praying with the humans, by citing them all together in this context he seems to imply that these animals were praying to God as intensely as the human beings and that their prayers were answered, resulting in everyone’s salvation. The fact that humans participated in this prayer with other animals shows also how firmly humans are perceived to be placed within the animal world.

²² The quotation has Muḥammad ibn Ja‘far al-Bāqir, which is clearly a mistake. What is meant is probably Muḥammad Abū Ja‘far al-Bāqir.

²³ A prayer performed with the aim of obtaining rain at a time of drought. It is usually performed in the outskirts of inhabited areas.

Ṣawm (fasting). In the context of his discussion of birds' language, al-Qurṭubī reports that the Prophet prohibited the killing of a number of animal species,²⁴ one of which was the magpie (*al-ṣurad*). It is said that this bird was the creature that “showed Adam the location of *al-Bayt* (the *Ka'ba*) and was the first creature to fast, thus acquiring the nickname of *al-Ṣawwām* [the continually fasting one]” (Q13: 115). Therefore, the magpie not only practices a form of worship that is practiced by humans, but it was a forerunner in this practice as well. The nickname *al-Ṣawwām*, the intensive form of the adjective *ṣā'im*, indicates that the magpie continues to practice this form of worship in an intensive manner. Likewise, after the flood, on the day when Noah's ship “came to rest upon [the mount] al-Judī” (11/Hūd: 44), this prophet, al-Qurṭubī informs us, “fasted and told all those who were with him – humans, wild beasts, birds, domestic animals, and all other animals – to fast as well, which they all did, in order to give thanks to God [for saving them]” (Q9: 29).

Self-sacrifice. In some of the exegetical treatments, nonhuman animals' acts of obedience to God are presented as involving a high degree of self-sacrifice. In a comment on the frogs that attacked Pharaoh and his people, al-Qurṭubī says that “a frog would even jump in a baking oven (*tannūr*) while its fire was blazing.” It did this “out of obedience to God (*ṭā'atan li-Allāh*)” (Q7: 172). Ibn Kathīr comments on the same act, noting that frogs did this only for the sake of obtaining God's pleasure (IK6: 378). Clearly, by making these comments, al-Qurṭubī and ibn Kathīr are trying to highlight the element of devotion in the frogs' act. Both exegetes also say that in return for their brave dedication God made frogs' croaking a form of praise (*tasbīḥ*), and the Prophet commanded that they should not be killed (even for medicinal uses).²⁵

Language and intelligence

Although nonhuman animals' possession of linguistic skills and rational faculties has already been suggested in their practice of *tasbīḥ*, the theme of nonhuman animal language is introduced in an undeniable way in the Qur'an with the two animals mentioned earlier – the ant and the hoopoe. Additionally, the Prophet Solomon, quoted in the Qur'an,

²⁴ These are ants, bees, hoopoes, and magpies. See Abū Dāwūd, *Sunan*, K. *al-Adab*, no. 5269.

²⁵ Al-Nasā'ī, *Sunan*, *al-Ṣayd wa-al-dhabā'ih*, no. 4372.

proclaims: "O humankind! We have been taught the language (*mantīq*) of birds" (27/al-Naml: 16), thus asserting that at least birds have languages. The few interactions that Solomon has with the ant and the hoopoe reveal several things about these two animals. First, their languages are presented as complex phenomena involving a high level of awareness and knowledge, which not only surpass the image humans usually hold about other animals, but in some aspects surpass the knowledge of ordinary humans (as opposed to prophets). Although the Qur'an quotes only two individual nonhuman animals, the fact that one of these, the ant, addresses its fellow colony members presupposes that at least the ants present in this scene partake in these linguistic skills. Furthermore, the Qur'an does not give us reason to think that possession of communicative systems is limited to the individual animals or species discussed in it. In this section, after discussing the concept of *mantīq* both in its Qur'anic and extra-Qur'anic usages, I will analyze the content of the linguistic utterances of the ant and the hoopoe and explore our exegetes' commentaries on them.

Qur'anic concepts of mantīq and nuṭq. The Qur'anic word *mantīq* and the derivatives of the same root have been the subject of much discussion in Islamic intellectual history. In the Qur'an, the word *mantīq* is used only with birds, and it is understood to refer to their language. However, the verb *naṭaq* (to speak, utter) occurs in connection with various beings, either to indicate that they do or do not speak. In one instance, a causative form of this verb (*antāq*: to cause to speak, to give speech to) is used with skins, which will be made to speak (along with everything else) on the Day of Judgment to witness against their (sinful) owners. Although the Qur'an asserts that certain beings, namely idols, do not speak, that assertion certainly does not limit the usage of language to humans or to the so-called rational beings.

Considering the frequent link between the concept of *nuṭq* and truthfulness in the Qur'an, Roger Arnaldez suggests that this text "uses this root with a normative quality; it is linked to the expression of truth and to justification." In view of these Qur'anic usages and connotations, Arnaldez concludes that it is "understandable that this root should have been chosen to translate the Greek *λογος* (word, reason) and *λογικος* (reasonable)."²⁶ Therefore, although the extra-Qur'anic meaning assigned to this word is not totally disconnected from its Qur'anic one, it is still

²⁶ EI2, s.v. "Mantīk" (by R. Arnaldez).

noteworthy that the word *mantiq* is used as a technical term “to designate a science of logic adapted from Aristotle and the Neoplatonists.”²⁷

Technical (extra-Qur'anic) meaning of mantiq and language theories. In its extra-Qur'anic usage, the word *mantiq* usually denotes both language and logic. Although there is little agreement on the nature, value, function, and universality of this concept (especially when it is taken to mean logic), it is generally agreed that *mantiq* is the monopoly of humans to the exclusion of all other (earthly) species. In fact, the common definition of the human being as *ḥayawān nāṭiq* (speaking/rational animal) is precisely based on this exclusion. Generally speaking, Muslim scholars do not question the fact that humans are animals, however, they believe that what sets them apart from all other (earthly) species is *mantiq*, both in the sense of language and reason. For example, Abū Sa'īd al-Sīrāfi (d. 368/979), for whom this word designates both *nuṭq* (articulation) and *ilm al-mantiq* (logic), understands the word *nuṭq* as “(a) the faculty with which man conceives the objects of reason (i.e. thoughts), (b) the thoughts that arise in his soul in the process of understanding, which are called internal *nuṭq*, (c) [and] the expression lent by the tongue to the thoughts of the mind, which is called external *nuṭq*.”²⁸ Therefore, *mantiq* here is understood to be an exclusively human phenomenon, or at least this phenomenon is described only among humans. Likewise, al-Iṣfahānī points out that the concept of *nuṭq* (speaking) is “said almost only about the human being (*lā yakād yuqāl illā li-al-insān*).”²⁹ Al-Rāzi cites a definition for the related concept of *kalām* (speech) stating that it consists of “letters which are arranged in a certain order (*muntazim*), audible (*masmū'a*), enunciated (*mutamayyiza*), and to which meanings are assigned (*mutawāḍa' alayhā*).” In his explanation of each of the words that make up this definition, he notes that the point of the adjective “enunciated (*mutamayyiza*)” is to exclude the sounds issued by many birds (*iḥtirāzan an aṣwāt kathīr min al-ṭuyūr*).³⁰ *Kalām*, therefore, cannot refer to articulations or other forms of communicative skills

²⁷ John Esposito, *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), s.v. “logic.”

²⁸ Muhammet Gunaydin, “Al-Sīrāfi's Theory of 'Lingua-Logical' Grammar: an Analytical Study of the Grammatical Work of al-Sīrāfi (Sharḥ Kitāb Sibawayhi) within the Context of a Discussion on Language and Logic in Medieval Islam” (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2006), 191.

²⁹ Al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, *Mufradāt al-fāz al-Qur'an* (Damascus: Dār al-Qalam, 1992), s.v. “n-ṭ-q.”

³⁰ Al-Rāzi, *Al-Maḥṣūl fī 'ilm uṣūl al-fiqh* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risāla, 1992), 1: 177–8.

that may exist among other species. Whereas these definitions do not necessarily indicate that nonhuman animals lack all sorts of mental and communicative skills (as they do not rule out the possibility that they think or communicate in ways which differ from those of humans), other discussions clearly try to make this point, that is, limit *manṭiq* to humans. For example, in the opinion of ibn Ḥazm, it is explicitly stated that if nonhuman animals do not have a type of logic or language that humans can recognize as such or that corresponds to human logic and language, then this leads us to conclude that they have no logic and no language at all because the only things that qualify as logic and language are the human forms of them. It needs to be remembered also that, on the only occasion that the word *manṭiq* occurs in the Qur'an, it refers to birds' language. In view of this, it is perhaps ironical that al-Rāzī's definition of the related concept of *kalām* (speech) is specifically formulated so as to exclude this very animal category from his definition.

Animals that speak in the Qur'an. One of the noticeable things about Solomon's proclamation is that it presents the element of birds' language as a constant or natural fact, and the new or unusual element that makes his statement worthy of being announced is the human, namely Solomon's, access to it.³¹ None of the four consulted exegetes deny that birds, throughout the ages, have had a language (or languages), however, al-Rāzī downplays the value of this language to make it fit his idea of nonhuman animals as nonrational creatures. For him, the *manṭiq* (language/logic) of birds refers to "what birds understand from one another about their intentions and objects of desire" (R24: 160). Although this definition may indicate that in his view this language may be complex, the opinions he reports about the meanings and usages of the word *manṭiq* betray his desire to de-emphasize the importance of this language. He, for example, reports al-Zamakhshari (d. 538/1144), who says, "*manṭiq* is any issued sound whether meaningful or meaningless, simple or compound" (R24: 160).³² In other words, because the word *manṭiq* can be brought down to the simple issuance of sounds, the Qur'anic assertion that birds have a *manṭiq* does not necessarily indicate that they have a language.

³¹ Note that in his discussion of the birds that practiced *tasbīḥ* with the Prophet David, al-Rāzī considers the miracle to be the fact that birds were raised to the mental level of adolescents (so that they could practice *tasbīḥ*) and not that a human being could miraculously understand their speech (R22: 200).

³² Al-Zamakhshari, *Al-Kashshāf 'an ḥaqā'iq ghawāmiḍ al-tanzīl wa-'uyūn al-aqāwīl fī wujūb al-tāwīl* (Riyadh: Maktabat al-'Abikān, 1998), 4: 437–8.

Al-Rāzī, still quoting al-Zamakhsharī, adds that, in referring to the sounds issued by doves, the Arabs use the verb *nataq* (to utter, to talk or to pronounce). By this, al-Rāzī and al-Zamakhsharī are probably trying to assert that the same verb has been used to refer to the dove's cooing, which in the human view is a meaningless sound, thus confirming that the word *manṭiq* may be limited to mere sounds. Both al-Rāzī and al-Zamakhsharī also say that "Ya'qūb [ibn Ishāq ibn al-Sikkīt] (d. 244/857 or 8) entitled his book '*Iṣlāḥ al-manṭiq*,' [the Correction of *al-manṭiq*],³³ although the only things he corrected in it were vocabulary items" (R24: 160). Even if this definition expands the meaning of *manṭiq* to include some linguistic features, it still remains limited to lexical items and does not necessarily have to involve syntax or to denote any significant degree of complexity (R24: 160).³⁴ By citing these opinions about and usages of the word *manṭiq* and its derivatives in the context of the discussion of birds' language, al-Rāzī is clearly eager to assert that, even if one accepts that birds may have a means of communication among themselves, their communication is at a rudimentary level of language, perhaps a level that only works for "base" drives, like food and sex. It is also notable that in the same discussion al-Zamakhsharī quotes a number of statements and maxims supposedly articulated by different birds and other animal species, however, al-Rāzī neglects to report this part, which points even further to his desire to minimize the phenomenon of nonhuman animals' languages. The same articulations, however, are reported by al-Qurṭubī, who also cites Abū Ja'far al-Naḥḥās (d. 338/950) as saying that "*manṭiq* is anything that can be understood without necessarily being issued in words" (13: 112).³⁵ Therefore, the word *manṭiq* in this definition has more to do with meaning and content than it does with sounds.

The Qur'anic affirmation that birds have a *manṭiq* was perplexing to many others. Ibn Kathīr reports that "the ignorant among people claim that [nonhuman] animals used to speak like humans before Solomon" (IK10: 396). The adherents to this opinion seem to have had difficulty imagining that the birds they saw might have an intelligible language and sought to solve this difficulty by proposing that a major change occurred, before which nonhuman animals had had languages understandable to

³³ Abū Yūsuf Ya'qūb ibn Ishāq ibn al-Sikkīt, *Iṣlāḥ al-manṭiq* (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1956).

³⁴ Al-Zamakhsharī, *Al-Kashshāf*, 4: 438.

³⁵ Abū Ja'far al-Naḥḥās, *Irāb al-Qur'an* (Cairo: 'Ālam al-Kutub, 1985), 3: 201.

humans and comparable to human ones. Ibn Kathīr, however, rejects this opinion. He explains, “If indeed this were the case, then singling Solomon out with the faculty of understanding birds’ language in this verse would become pointless, as this opinion presupposes that all people up until his time possessed this faculty as well” (IK10: 396). Ibn Kathīr asserts that “animals, birds and all other creatures have always been as we see them today. But God allowed Solomon to understand their languages” (IK10: 396). This means that these animals have always had languages, however, their languages have never been accessible to humans, except in exceptional circumstances. Al-Ṭabarī (Ṭ9: 503) also agrees that birds’ language is a true language comparable to that of humans.

In the opinion of al-Qurṭubī, “Muslim scholars agree that all animals have minds and understandings (*lā ikhtilāfa ‘inda al-‘ulamā’i anna al-ḥayawānāti kullahā labā afhāmun wa-‘uqūl*)” and cites a number of them to support his statement. For example, he quotes al-Shāfi‘ī (d. 204/820) as stating that “pigeons are the wisest birds,”³⁶ and ibn ‘Aṭīyya (d. 546/1147) as discussing many aspects of ants’ “intelligence,” such as the storage of food and building of anthills (*qurā*).³⁷ Another skill that in ibn ‘Aṭīyya’s opinion bespeaks the intelligence of ants is that, when they store grain, they divide it into two parts to prevent it from germinating; an exception is coriander, which they divide into four parts because if it is divided into two it would still germinate.³⁸ “This,” in the opinion of the exegete ibn al-‘Arabī (who is also quoted by al-Qurṭubī), “is exactly what constitutes knowledge for us [humans]. Ants have acquired it because God created it in them.”³⁹ Finally, al-Qurṭubī quotes Abū al-Muẓaffar Shāhfūr al-Isfarāyīnī (d. 471/1078) as stating that “it is not impossible (*lā yab‘ud*) that animals comprehend the idea of the creation of the world and all creatures as well as the concept of God’s unity, but we cannot communicate with them” (Q13: 118).⁴⁰ Therefore, in the opinion of al-Qurṭubī and the scholars he quotes, nonhuman animals not only possess languages that are highly developed, as he has asserted many times, but also all the mental faculties that accompany such languages.

³⁶ Muḥammad ibn Idrīs al-Shāfi‘ī, *Kitāb al-umm* (Cairo: Dār al-Wafā’, 2001), 3: 506.

³⁷ ‘Abd al-Ḥaqq ibn Ghālib ibn ‘Aṭīyyah, *al-Muḥarrar al-uwayj fī tafsīr al-Kitāb al-‘azīz* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 2001), 4: 253.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Aḥkām al-Qur’an*, 3: 472.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 3: 472–3.

THE HOOPOE. The Qur'anic report of the interaction between Solomon and the hoopoe is as follows:

[Solomon] sought among the birds and said: How is it that I see not the hoopoe, or is he among the absent? I will punish him with hard punishment or I will lay him, or he shall bring me a plain excuse. But he was not long in coming and he said: I have found out (a thing) that you do not apprehend, and I come unto you from Sheba with sure tidings. I found a woman ruling over them, and she has been given (abundance) of all things, and hers is a mighty throne. I found her and her people worshipping the sun instead of God; and Satan makes their works fair-seeming unto them, and debars them from the way (of Truth), so that they go not aright: So that they worship not God, Who brings forth the hidden in the heavens and the earth, and knows what you hide and what you proclaim. God; there is no God save Him, the Lord of the mighty Throne. (27/al-Naml: 20–26)

The hoopoe's exchange with Solomon not only points to its possession of a language, but more importantly, to all the complexity and intelligence of which language is an indication. For example, we see that it is aware of its larger environment to a point that exceeds even that of the Prophet Solomon, who did not know about Sheba before the hoopoe's report. The exegetes are astonished that a bird may know something of which a prophet has no knowledge, especially because the distance between Solomon and the kingdom of Sheba, as they say, was not so great. The only justification they provide for this is that God had concealed the existence of this kingdom from Solomon for a good reason (*maṣlahā*), but none of them specifies what this good reason was (Q13: 122). One would wonder whether this *maṣlahā* could simply be to teach humans a measure of humility because Solomon, and by extension the Qur'an's audience, are informed that humans are not necessarily more knowledgeable than hoopoes and other animals. The theme of humans' limited knowledge is of course explicitly reiterated in the statement "and of knowledge you have been given but little" (17/al-Isrā': 85).

The hoopoe in this story not only reports facts to Solomon, but also provides an assessment of the situation on both the political and spiritual levels. Politically, it informs Solomon that the Queen has been given abundance of all things, and that hers is a mighty throne. This aspect of its report also was relatively perplexing to some of the consulted exegetes, especially that the hoopoe uses in its description of the Queen's throne the same adjective (*'azīm*: mighty), which it uses to describe God's throne, hence apparently creating the impression that the two thrones may be equal or similar. They are also astonished that this Queen could leave such a strong impression on the hoopoe despite the fact that Solomon's rule, which this bird knew well, was even greater than hers.

The exegetes' attitudes toward the hoopoe's report vary between full acceptance and slight skepticism. On the one hand, they go into detail in their description of the Queen's throne and rule to justify the hoopoe's opinion (IK10: 401; T9: 510; Q13: 123); on the other, they specify that the abundance of what she was given and the greatness of her throne are only relative matters (T9: 512; Q13: 123). One of al-Rāzi's justifications for this exaggeration is even interesting. He suggests that the hoopoe might deliberately have overstated its report lest Solomon take her rule lightly when he compared it to his own (R24: 164). The hoopoe is thus perceived as a highly intelligent being, for it not only reports facts or weighs situations, but is also portrayed as a refined observer that understands well how its interlocutor thinks and consequently how to present its case to him in a persuasive manner.

Despite the strong impression the Queen of Sheba and her rule left on the hoopoe, it was still able to perceive and report on the serious religious flaws of her and her people. The Queen and her people according to the hoopoe are gravely misguided, for instead of worshipping God, they worship the sun. The hoopoe's awareness of the magnitude of this fault is heightened by its own knowledge of divine attributes, especially among them God's capability of bringing forth what is hidden in the heavens and in the earth, an attribute that the hoopoe is particularly well situated to appreciate, our exegetes point out, in light of its own presumed capability of seeing the things that are hidden under the ground.⁴¹ Despite this acute awareness of their misdeeds, the hoopoe's criticism of their behavior is attenuated by its putting the blame on Satan, who makes "their works fair-seeming unto them." In an admiring remark, al-Qurṭubī comments on this part of the hoopoe's report saying:

God, the Exalted, bestowed on it knowledge of His unity and of the necessity of prostrating to Him [alone] as well as the disapproval of their prostration to the sun and the attribution of this deed to Satan. In the same way, He bestowed on *other birds and all other animals this type of knowledge*, which, *sometimes even great [human] minds are unable to grasp*. (Q13: 126)

Hence, the report suggests that nonhuman animals are not only equal to humans in their rational faculties, but may also in this respect be better than many of them, including even those who have great minds.

⁴¹ The hoopoe supposedly possesses the ability of seeing underground water. Ibn Kathir notes that describing God from this angle is particularly appropriate for the hoopoe in view of this skill (IK10: 402). See also Jacob Lassner, *Demonizing the Queen of Sheba: Boundaries of Gender and Culture in Postbiblical Judaism and Medieval Islam* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), 187–9.

THE ANT. In addition to birds, it is explicitly mentioned in the Qur'an that the Prophet Solomon understood the communication of an ant. The Qur'an says, "When they reached the Valley of the Ants, an ant exclaimed: O ants! Enter your dwellings lest Solomon and his armies crush you, unperceiving. And (Solomon) smiled, laughing at her speech, and said: My Lord, arouse me to be thankful for Your favour wherewith You have favoured me and my parents" (27/al-Naml: 18–19).

Because verse 27/al-Naml: 16 establishes Solomon's ability to understand the language of birds, some of the exegetes felt the necessity of accounting for his ability to understand this ant's speech as well, although the verse does not negate Solomon's ability to understand other nonhuman creatures. Al-Qurṭubī quotes Al-Sha'bī (d. 103/721) as stating that "this ant had wings, hence becoming one of the flying creatures (*ṭayr*), which made it possible for Solomon to understand its speech" (Q13: 114). On the other hand, he notes that the exegete ibn al-'Arabī considered totally invalid the opinion that Solomon knew the language of birds (or flying creatures) only and claimed that there is consensus among people that he (Solomon) understood even the languages of the creatures that could not issue sounds, such as plants (Q13: 112).⁴² Ibn Kathīr asserts that Solomon "knew the languages of birds and all other animals, a faculty with which he was singled out among all humankind" (IK10: 396).

Al-Rāzī, the least inclined among the four consulted exegetes to grant that nonhuman animals may be more complex than what appears to humans, is totally convinced that the ant and the hoopoe produced real and complex languages, which were accompanied by rational faculties, however, only to a limited extent. He even goes so far as to counter those who deny this phenomenon. He says,

It is not farfetched that this ant speak, because God is capable of creating in it both reason and speech. The heretics contested this story, arguing that the ant and the hoopoe produced speech that can be articulated only by rational creatures. If we accept such a thing, they say, it should become possible also that the ants, the lice and the nits we see in our time are more knowledgeable about geometry than Euclid and about syntax than Sibawayhi (d. ca. 180/796). Furthermore, it may be possible that these creatures have among them prophets, that they have religious precepts which they are obligated to observe, and that they have miracles among them. However, it is known that holding such opinions amounts to insanity. (R24: 164)

The reason why this group questions nonhuman animals' possession of linguistic and rational faculties is that once this is conceded, one might

⁴² See also ibn al-'Arabī, *Aḥkām al-Qur'an*, 3: 1439.

also have to concede that nonhuman animals can (or do) replicate the human model in all possible respects. Although it is possible to account for this attitude simply by the fact that such perceptions of nonhuman animals conflict with the way humans generally experience them, an additional underlying concern appears to be a perceived threat to the special status of humans, which suggests that these views are also motivated by anthropocentric feelings. This group's anthropocentrism is also discernible in their insistence on seeing and evaluating the world of other animals through human lenses. Nonhuman animals can have worthwhile life experiences or they can be considered complex beings only if they have rational faculties identical to those possessed by (the most intelligent) humans, which would allow them to know geometry as well as Euclid, or (Arabic) grammar as well as Sibawayhi.

It is also to be noted that despite al-Rāzī's criticism of this group, he is in more agreement with them than he leads us to believe, for the only difference between him and them is that he allows room for occasional exceptions that take the form of miracles, whereas the others do not. In fact, even in these exceptions, he prefers to remain on the reserved side, as he is willing to grant concessions only to the extent of barely accounting for the Qur'anic data. He admits that Solomon's hoopoe and ant had rational faculties and languages, but only to the level that would allow them to issue the statements reported in the Qur'an, and not to a level that would make them comparable to adult humans or subject to *taklif*. About the ant, al-Rāzī says that it "approached the level of rationality (*al-'aql*)," hence indicating that it is not fully rational (R24: 161). As for birds, including the hoopoe, he asserts that it is not possible that they reach the rational level that would require *taklif*. It is nonetheless interesting that despite these views, al-Rāzī often expresses his fascination with the behavior of a number of animal species that display their intelligence. For example, he says about flying creatures,

God made the birds at the time of Solomon to be among the rational creatures, which is not the case with birds at our time, although there are among birds and other flying creatures those which God has taught [intuitive minute knowledge] of the things that are necessary for their own survival and the things that can benefit human beings, such as is the case with bees. (R24: 160)

Moreover, as we will see in more detail, his discussion of the behavior of Solomon's ant presents this animal as an extremely judicious and rational being that may compare favorably to the wisest of humans.

The few sentences articulated by Solomon's ant point to a number of mental traits that the Qur'an seems to ascribe to the ant species, or at

least to this ant and its colony. First, like the hoopoe, this ant is portrayed as having a good awareness of its environment, as it is not only aware that a threat is facing its colony, but also of the specific identity of the army that poses this threat. It is also intelligent enough to know what the right answer to this threat is, as it commands the other ants to enter their dwellings to avoid it. The ant is even aware of the (hidden) non-malicious intentions of Solomon and his army, as it specifies that even if the latter crush them, they would not do this deliberately. As pointed out, the fact that this ant addresses its community presupposes that at least this entire ant colony partakes in these linguistic skills and elements of its knowledge, such as who Solomon is (considering the reference to him by his name); what an army is, does, or is capable of doing; and what are good and bad intentions.

Solomon's ant left a strong impression on the Qur'an's audience. This is noticeable for example in the degree of its individualization, as in many reports it has been assigned a name. It is also reported that it was as big as a wolf or a ewe. In the opinion of Muḥammad ibn 'Alī al-Tirmidhī (d. 320/932), this unnatural size is attributed to it to account for its possession of a voice and consequently its possession of a language, whereas other ants in his opinion have no voice because of their small size (Q13: 115). Noticeably, the insistence on imagining this ant in human terms (size comparable to that of humans and the question of whether or not it had a voice and a name) implies a number of human projections, which are an indication of the tension between the general human idea and the image of a speaking ant that emerges from the Qur'an. In his comment on these opinions, al-Qurṭubī tries to liberate his readers from this anthropocentric approach. He neither confirms nor totally rules out the possibility that this ant had a name, saying, "if it truly had one, then it must be a name that God assigned to it in some of the Scriptures and made known to prophets, and this was because of its speech and strong faith" (Q13: 114). Therefore, even if this ant has a name, it is not in order that it fit better with the human idea of a "speaking animal," but rather because God decided to assign it a name for reasons that have to do with its devoutness, and therefore for theocentric rather than anthropocentric reasons. Later in his discussion of the ant's speech, he also asserts that a language does not necessarily have to be spoken in a voice audible to all of us.⁴³ To bring this idea closer to the human mind, he gives an example

⁴³ Modern research indicates that ants "employ the most complex forms of chemical communication of any animals," Bert Hölldobler and Edward O. Wilson, *The Ants*

that humans can understand well. He says, "The human being sometimes experiences in his/her heart words and speeches which no one around him/her can hear unless they are articulated out loud. It is known also that God miraculously made known to our Prophet what went on in some people's minds. The same faculty was given to many saints whom God dignified with such graces" (Q13: 117). By opting for the opinion that mental speech (*al-kalām al-naḥsī*) is part of language and asserting that speech does not necessarily have to be articulated in an audible manner, al-Qurṭubī makes it easier for his readers to imagine nonhuman animals' possession of languages, which may be similar to human ones in terms of content rather than in terms of form.⁴⁴

The consulted exegetes reject the version that exaggerates the ant's size. Whereas al-Rāzī does not even allude to this point, al-Ṭabarī simply reports an opinion specifying that Solomon's ants were the size of flies (T9: 504), and al-Qurṭubī argues that if this ant were the size of a wolf or a ewe then it would not have been possible for Solomon not to notice them and therefore to crush them "unperceiving," hence deducing from the Qur'anic depiction of this scene an argument against this opinion (Q13: 115). Ibn Kathīr, who affirms that he has seen it written that these ants were the size of *dhi'āb* (wolves), asserts that this word is misspelled and that the true word is *dhubāb* (flies), with just one dot under the letter *bā'*, and not two dots that would make it a *yā'*, hence making the word *dhiyāb* (wolves) (IK10: 397).

In the exegetical works, not only is Solomon's ant the subject of great admiration, but also many aspects of its behavior are portrayed as models to be emulated by humans. Among the four exegetes, al-Rāzī and al-Qurṭubī are the most impressed by its speech and behavior, and al-Rāzī goes so far as to take its behavior as a foundation for legal regulations and evidence for the validity of some religious ideas. Some exegetes also

(Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1990), 1. For more on ants' communication, see Hölldobler and Wilson, *The Ants*, 227–97. About ants' social organization and other skills, see also Mark W. Moffett, *Adventures Among Ants: A Global Safari with a Cast of Trillions* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).

⁴⁴ Islamic schools of thought differ on whether it is possible to consider mental speech (*al-kalām al-naḥsī*) language. For the Mu'tazilī al-Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār (d. 415/1024), thoughts or feelings that one experiences before speaking are considered "intention (*qaṣd*), will (*irāda*), decision (*azm*) to speak, or thinking of how to arrange one's ideas." 'Abd al-Jabbār ibn Aḥmad, *Sharḥ al-uṣūl al-khamsa*, (Cairo: Maktabat Wahba, 1996), 533. The Ash'arī al-Juwaynī (d. 478/1085), by contrast, states that "true speech for us is established in the soul (*al-kalām al-ḥaqq 'indanā qā'im bi-al-naḥs*). Al-Juwaynī, *Al-Burbān fī uṣūl al-fiqh* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-Ilmiyya, 1997), 1: 84. For more on this point, see Yunis Ali, *Medieval Islamic Pragmatics*, 30.

seize the opportunity of discussing Solomon's ant to praise the entire ant species. This ant managed to obtain the exegetes' admiration partly because of its impressive wisdom. Al-Rāzī says that he read in a book that it commanded its fellow colony members to enter their dwellings not out of fear that Solomon and his army would crush them physically, but rather out of fear that they (the ants) would fall into the temptation of desiring the prestige and the worldly things that God bestowed on him (R24: 161). Based on the ant's alleged reasoning, al-Rāzī concludes that the company of wealthy people should be avoided to elude falling into the same temptation. Therefore, he not only accepts the ant's reasoning, but also makes it a foundation for proper human behavior. Al-Rāzī's trust in this ant's wisdom is also noticeable in some of the deductions he reaches on the basis of what it says. In his comment on the word *unperceiving* with which the ant qualifies Solomon's possible destruction of this colony, he says, "as if it knew that prophets are infallible and that they would not kill animals except by mistake," and deduces from its comment evidence for the principle of prophets' infallibility in general (R24: 161). Furthermore, he asserts that because of its knowledge of this particular point, the infallibility of prophets (*'iṣmat al-anbiyā'*), this ant deserved the leading position that it enjoyed (R2: 178). Al-Rāzī also finds in the ant's behavior a legal precedent for humans. Because it commanded its fellow colony members to enter their dwellings to avoid the threat posed by Solomon and his army, he concludes that "the one who walks on a road is not obligated to be alert, but that alertness is the duty of the one who is already on that road."⁴⁵ Despite al-Rāzī's conviction that nonhuman animals in general possess no rational faculties, in the case of this particular ant he not only grants that it is wise and intelligent, but even raises it to a level above the human one, as it becomes a model for proper human behavior and correct reasoning in many ways. Coming from al-Rāzī, the least willing of our exegetes to extend any significant sophistication to nonhuman earthly animals, such views are quite remarkable. Even if nonhuman earthly animals in his opinion remain generally inferior to humans, he is willing to raise at least one nonhuman animal (and, for that matter, an insect) above many or most humans. This shows that even with an exegete whose "sense of authority" consists

⁴⁵ On this point, al-Shāfi'i explains that although sleeping at night in the middle of the road is not prohibited (*muḥarram*), in some situation it may not be allowed as it may interfere with people's ability to use that road. Muḥammad ibn Idrīs al-Shāfi'i, *al-Risāla*, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya) 2: 352–3.

mostly of the “intellect,” to use Calder’s words, the Qur’an still managed to have an impact on his attitude toward nonhuman animals.⁴⁶

Al-Qurṭubī’s treatment of Solomon’s ant also shows his great admiration for it. In addition to making its story quite colorful, he, like al-Rāzī, highlights the ant’s wisdom and knowledge, suggests that it has poetic skills, and puts special emphasis on its faith. In his discussion, Solomon himself appears to have been impressed by the ant’s wisdom and flattered by its high opinion of him (Q13: 114). In his concluding remarks about this ant, al-Qurṭubī makes sure to praise the entire ant species and explains why ants (along with other nonhuman animals) enjoyed a particularly high status in Islamic tradition.

THE ANT’S FAITH. In addition to reporting the same concerns discussed by al-Rāzī (i.e., its fear of temptation), this ant, in al-Qurṭubī’s account, adds that it warned its fellow colony members because it “was also afraid that by looking at (Solomon’s) reign they would be distracted from praising and remembering God” (Q13: 115). The ant’s faith is so strong that it not only wants to protect its community from falling into prospective worldly temptations, but is even unwilling to let them be distracted from worshipping God for the time of Solomon’s passage through their valley. As noted, al-Qurṭubī also attributes the possibility that a proper name has been divinely assigned to it to the fact that its faith is strong. Likewise, he finds in the word *unperceiving*, with which it characterizes Solomon’s possible destruction of their colony, an indication of “the thoughtfulness of a faithful creature” (*iltifāṭatu mu’min*, Q13: 114). Al-Qurṭubī’s point is perhaps that thanks to its faith, this ant has become fair enough not to issue random judgments and insightful enough to recognize the qualities of a prophet. In any case, it knew that “because of his fairness and great character, Solomon and his army would tread on an ant or any smaller creature only if they did not know about it” (Q13: 114). Considering al-Qurṭubī’s continual attention to the question of nonhuman animals’ welfare, it is not farfetched to consider that in his opinion Solomon’s behavior represents a model for all humans, or at least all Muslims, who should be careful not to harm other animals deliberately.

Al-Qurṭubī also draws a parallel between this ant’s comment on Solomon and his army and God’s comment on the Prophet Muḥammad and his army, which states, “And if it had not been for believing men

⁴⁶ Calder, “Tafsir from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathir” 134. Calder argues that three competing senses of authority – what he designates as community, intellect, and text – characterize, respectively, the works of al-Qurṭubī, al-Rāzī, and Ibn Kathir.

and believing women, whom you know not – lest you should tread them under foot and thus incur guilt for them unknowingly” (48/al-Fath: 25).⁴⁷ Al-Qurṭubī’s point is that both armies, which are depicted as “pious, fair, and compassionate,” would not destroy any innocent creature deliberately, be they human or nonhuman. Al-Qurṭubī still finds God’s praise of Muḥammad and his army to be more valuable than this ant’s praise of Solomon and his army, but the parallel is still striking, for even if God’s praise is more valuable than that of the ant, there still seems to be a parallel in the analogy between the believing men and women on the one hand, and the ants on the other. Both groups’ lives are valuable and deserve to be protected.

THE ANT’S KNOWLEDGE. In al-Qurṭubī’s account, Solomon, perhaps teasingly, asked this ant, “How come you warned other ants of me? Did you suspect me of tyranny? Didn’t you know I am a righteous prophet?” to which the ant replied, “haven’t you heard me saying ‘unperceiving?’” Solomon seems to have been impressed, or at least amused, by the ant’s reply, for after listening to its answer, he asked that it teach him something, prompting it to discuss with him the meaning of his and his father’s names (Q13: 115). The discussion reveals different characteristics about the ant. In addition to its insight into (the Arabic?) language and etymology, it appears also to have knowledge of the character of both the Prophet Solomon and his father and to be capable of reflections about life in general (Q13: 115).

THE ANT’S GENEROSITY AND POETIC SKILL. The ant afterwards sought to give a gift to “God’s Prophet,” however, it turned out that its colony only had a lotus bean, which was considered to be unworthy of a prophet. The ant, however, deeming the bean good enough, started pulling it until God ordered the wind to carry them (the ant and the fruit). “Therefore,” al-Qurṭubī comments, “the ant went to Solomon [flying] on a carpet, crossing over humans and jinn, scholars and prophets, until it reached him.” When it finally presented the gift to Solomon, it recited:

Do not we give to God what is already His?
 He accepts our gifts though He has no needs,
 Had we to give God but what is worthy of Him,
 Sea and seashore would not suffice,
 But we love to give to the One we love

⁴⁷ In relation to the Ḥudaybiyya treaty and related events, see Karen Armstrong, *Muḥammad: A Prophet for our Time* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2006), 175–200.

He is obligingly appreciative
 He, indeed, is the most kind.

The ant's persuasive verses were successful, as Solomon accepted the gift and in return prayed that God bless all ants. Al-Qurṭubī comments that "because of this prayer ants have become the most thankful and the most numerous creatures" (Q13: 115).

Al-Qurṭubī's discussion of Solomon's ant and hoopoe corroborates Calder's opinion about this exegete's hermeneutic approach. Calder, who affirms that, like al-Rāzī and ibn Kathīr, al-Qurṭubī has "a foregrounded theology," notes nonetheless that the "foci of Qurṭubī's theology were the *text of the Qur'an* and the *experience of the community*" (emphases added).⁴⁸ This exegete's reaction to the themes of language and rationality among nonhuman animals illustrates Calder's observation. Unlike al-Rāzī, for example, al-Qurṭubī does not ascribe the ant and the hoopoe's ability to speak to a miracle, thus, perhaps in tune with a literal reading of the Qur'an, allowing for the existence of linguistic skills among all animals. Remarkably also, al-Qurṭubī's ultimate source on the preceding anecdotes is "a book" cited by Abū Ishāq al-Tha'labī (d.427/1035). This, in conformity with Calder's observation, reveals "Qurṭubī's sense of the organically growing experience of the *Muslim community in confrontation with scripture*."⁴⁹ The idea of nonhuman animals that speak and interact in intelligent ways seems to have become so widely accepted, largely as a result of the Qur'an's stand on this topic, that al-Qurṭubī hardly feels the need to provide solid evidence for it.

Morality

So far, nonhuman animals in the Qur'an have been portrayed as innocent creatures that consistently worship God; and, in accordance with His divine will, a number of species are dutifully of service to humans. In the view of our exegetes, they are often perceived as inferior to humans because of their supposed lack of rationality, however, they are still considered free of guilt and presumably remain morally pure. Solomon's interaction with the hoopoe, however, casts doubt on this perception of nonhuman animals. After the hoopoe presents its report about the Queen of Sheba and her rule, Solomon comments, "We shall see whether you speak truth or whether you are of the liars" (27/al-Naml: 27), hence raising the possibility that the hoopoe is capable of lying. Although the

⁴⁸ Calder, "Tafsīr from Ṭabarī to Ibn Kathīr," 114–5.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 115.

hoopoe proved to be truthful in its report, Solomon's comment still raises the question of animal morality. Could nonhuman animals in general tell lies or perform any other immoral acts? And if so, would such behavior be considered a moral failing in their case, or would such judgment simply betray another anthropocentric value-judgment on our part? The consulted exegetes address the first question only at the level of some individual animals, whereas in their treatment of the second, the general attitude is to exempt nonhuman animals from any moral responsibility. In fact, the way many jurists and scholars of *kalām* formulate their theories of ethics is designed specifically to free, among others, nonhuman animals of moral blame.

Ethics in Islam is generally thought to correspond to the pronouncements of religious law about moral and ritual obligations, permissions, and prohibitions. However, whether such pronouncements can be known only through revelation or by applying human reason is the subject of controversy. In the Mu'tazili school it is maintained that "anyone can know the main obligations and prohibitions of life by his 'reason' (*'aql*), which includes the use of empirical observations and inferences,"⁵⁰ however, Ash'arīs and traditionalists consider that human reason is incapable of qualifying acts as good or bad (*taḥsīn* and *taqbiḥ*). According to the Mu'tazili school, human reason is capable of evaluating acts because of the "ontological premise about the nature of ethical value: that terms such as 'just,' 'obligatory,' and 'evil' refer to objective facts of the world in any particular context."⁵¹ In the case of lying, for example, once this act satisfies a few prerequisites, it becomes easy to evaluate it even without the help of religion. In 'Abd al-Jabbār's opinion, "It is known immediately that a lie, carrying no benefit and no repulsion of injury greater than it ... when a free and capable person performs [it, is] deserving of blame."⁵² Therefore, lying itself is generally deserving of blame, and this is known to us through reason even before revelation qualifies it as such.

In contrast with this opinion, al-Rāzī, defines "a bad thing" (*al-qabiḥ*) as that which is prohibited by revealed law (*al-manḥī 'anhu shar'an*), and "a good thing" (*al-ḥasan*) as "that which is not prohibited by revealed law (*mā lā yakūnu manḥī 'anhu shar'an*)."⁵³ Therefore, things do not have inherent or objective qualifications attached to them, but remain neutral

⁵⁰ George F. Hourani, "Divine Justice and Human Reason in Mu'tazilite Ethical Theology," in *Ethics in Islam*, ed. Richard G. Hovannisian (Malibu, CA: Undena, 1985), 77.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 75.

⁵² *Al-Mughnī*, 6: i. 62 (cited by Hourani, "Divine Justice," 77).

⁵³ Al-Rāzī, *al-Maḥṣūl*, 1: 108.

or unqualified until revealed law informs us of their ethical value. Because obligations and prohibitions in Islamic law are addressed only to those who are *mukallaf*, acts committed by those who are not *mukallaf* cannot be qualified either as good or bad. Based on this, if an insane person, someone in the state of sleep, a child, or a nonhuman animal damages someone's property, for example, the act itself, al-Rāzī explains, can neither be blamed nor praised, although the guardian (*wali*) of the party that caused the damage is obligated to compensate for such damage.⁵⁴

Although according to al-Rāzī's discussion, acts performed by those who are not in a state of *taklif* are neither good nor bad, al-Qāḍī al-Bayḍāwī (d. 685/1286) considers that "whatever religious law has prohibited is bad, and everything else, such as obligations, recommended things and permissible things are good." In their comments on this statement, the two Subkīs state that there is no question that obligations and recommended things are good, but there is no agreement on that which is merely permissible. Certainly, God's acts are good, whereas the acts of those who are not *mukallaf*, such as those who are in a state of sleep or distraction, and the acts of nonhuman animals are unanimously considered not bad, and therefore, they can either be considered good or in a middle state, between the good and the bad.⁵⁵ Thus, according to this view, nonhuman animals' acts are by definition judged either as good or as neutral, but they can never be seen as bad. Even in the Mu'tazili view, bad acts committed by nonhuman animals (or others who are not in a state of *taklif*) are bad and blameworthy, but this does not entail that the perpetrator of such acts is blameworthy. Therefore, the moral purity of nonhuman animals in this case is guaranteed by separating between the act and the one who does it.

Although nonhuman animals are exempted from any moral or legal responsibility, our exegetes do not fail to discuss many individual nonhuman animals in ethical terms, as possessing either good or bad morals. An example of the good side is found in al-Qurṭubī's report that the hoopoe may have been able to avoid Solomon's punishment because of its kindness to its parents, as it used to bring them food and feed them personally (Q13: 141), a moral virtue that is particularly valued in Islamic tradition. Likewise, ibn Kathīr reports that right before concluding the Ḥudaybiyya

⁵⁴ Ibid., 1: 105–8.

⁵⁵ Taqī al-Dīn 'Alī ibn 'Abd al-Kāfi al-Subkī (d. 756/1355) and his son Tāj al-Dīn 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Subkī (d. 771/1370), *al-Ibbāḥ fī sharḥ al-minhāj* (commentary on al-Qāḍī al-Bayḍāwī's *Minhāj al-wuṣūl ilā 'ilm al-uṣūl*) (Cairo: Maktabat al-Kulliyāt al-Azhariyya, 1981), 1: 62.

peace treaty with the tribe of Quraysh,⁵⁶ the Prophet and the believers headed for Mecca, but the Prophet's she-camel, al-Qaṣwā', at some point knelt down and became immovable. The Prophet's companions accused it of obstinacy (*khala'at*), however, the Prophet reassured them saying, "Obstinacy is not the kind of moral feature that would belong to al-Qaṣwā'." He further explained that "the same factor that held back the elephant (in reference to Abraha's attack on the *Ka'ba*) is now holding it back"⁵⁷ (IK13: 120; 14: 463–4), meaning that it was behaving according to divine commands and not following mere whims. Thus, the Prophet appears to ascribe to his she-camel some moral virtues.

As for the supposedly bad morals, al-Qurṭubī finds that Solomon questioned the hoopoe's truthfulness as a reaction to the proud tone discerned in its report when it said, "I have found [a thing] that you did not apprehend," thereby suggesting that the hoopoe could also be suffering from the moral imperfection of pride. In his discussion of nonhuman animals' resurrection, al-Rāzī reports the opinion of the Mu'tazili school of *kalām* on the theme of nonhuman animals' wrongs committed against one another, which would require compensation for the victim and punishment of the wrongdoer on the Judgment Day, hence pointing to the possibility that nonhuman animals can be (deliberate?) wrongdoers.⁵⁸

Although the Qur'an's hoopoe proved innocent of the moral imperfection of which it was suspected, and many of the other imperfections attributed to this or other nonhuman animals remain at the speculative level, the mere fact that the Qur'an points to the possibility of the hoopoe's possession of the specific capability of misrepresenting facts is perhaps meant to reveal certain characteristics belonging to (certain?) nonhuman animals that are otherwise unknown to the Qur'anic audience. After all, the capability of telling lies can simultaneously be a sign of moral corruption (at least according to general human norms) and of intelligence, hence, once again, indicating that the Qur'an perhaps does not consider nonhuman animals as devoid of intelligence as they are generally believed to be.⁵⁹ Although someone like al-Rāzī would still limit the

⁵⁶ The peace treaty of Ḥudaybiyya took place in the year 628 between the tribe of Quraysh and the Prophet.

⁵⁷ Al-Bukhārī *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *al-Shurūt*, no. 2770.

⁵⁸ On this point, see Margaretha Heemskerk, *Suffering in the Mu'tazilite Theology* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 164–6.

⁵⁹ For modern views on nonhuman animals' ability to deceive other individuals, see *Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics*, second edition, s.v. "Animal Communication: Deception and Honest Signaling" (by Redouan Bshary), 267–70.

effect of this theme and insist that it is hardly representative of the reality of all nonhuman animals, I think that the mere possibility of inferring such a theme in the Qur'an is both intriguing and significant.

Inspiration

The Divine address to the bee found in verses 16/al-Naḥl: 68–9 is another intriguing animal theme in the Qur'an. The verses say, “And your Lord inspired the bee, saying: Choose habitations in the hills and in the trees and that which they thatch; Then eat of all fruits, and follow the ways of your Lord, made smooth [for you].” The verb *awḥā* (inspired), the exegetes explain, means *alham* (also to inspire), to tell, and to cast into one's soul. Al-Qurṭubī also explains that *wahy* (inspiration) is what “God creates in someone's heart all at once (*ibtidā'an*) and without any apparent cause” (Q10: 88). Among the creatures that may be (and actually are) divinely inspired, al-Qurṭubī further explains, there are beasts (*al-bahā'im*) “in whose [souls] God creates understanding of how to acquire benefits, avoid harmful things and manage their lives” (Q10: 88). Therefore, if we accept al-Qurṭubī's opinion, *wahy* is not a privilege bestowed on bees only, but is rather shared by all other animals.⁶⁰

Wahy in the Qur'an constitutes one of three ways in which God communicates with human beings.⁶¹ In addition to Prophets, among the people who received *wahy* there is, for example, Moses' mother, about whom the Qur'an says: “And We inspired the mother of Moses, saying: Suckle him and, when you fear for him, then cast him in the river and fear not nor grieve.” (28/al-Qaṣaṣ: 7). Al-Qurṭubī says that the type of *wahy* Moses' mother received from God was either in the form of *ilhām* (inspiration, i.e., by casting this directly in her heart) or *ilām* (notification, i.e., through the angel Gabriel). However, both he and al-Ṭabarī make the explicit point that there is consensus that her reception of *wahy* does not make her a prophetess (Q13: 166; Ṭ10: 28).⁶² This very comment, however, implies that she has been deemed to be one, and apparently this was only or mainly because she received divine *wahy*, which bespeaks the important status of the creatures that are divinely inspired.

⁶⁰ Judging from his general use of the word *bahā'im*, it is likely that al-Qurṭubī uses it to refer to all nonhuman animals.

⁶¹ The other two forms are addressing someone from behind a veil or communicating via an angelic messenger (42/al-Shūrā: 51).

⁶² Note that al-Qurṭubī does not rule out the possibility that a woman can be a prophetess, but his view on this matter seems to have gradually changed. See his *tafsir*, 4: 53; 6: 162; and 11: 20.

Alma Giese notices that in the case of bees also it is argued that the *wahy* they received consisted of real revelation that reached the *umma* of bees via a prophet.⁶³

Through the medium of inspiration, al-Rāzī explains, God taught bees how to build their hives in the hexagonal shape – the sides of which are exactly the same size – something that a rational human being would be able to do only if using rulers and compasses. The hexagonal shape itself is the ideal form for the hives, al-Rāzī and al-Qurtūbī assert, for it is the only one that leaves no gaps between the cells. Furthermore, al-Rāzī seems impressed by the beehive's social structure, which involves a queen that the worker bees serve and carry around upon moving from one place to another. Bees' sensory perception of music is another astonishing fact. Al-Rāzī says that if bees abandon their hives, they can be brought back by playing music for them. Al-Rāzī concludes that because this animal "is singled out by these marvelous characteristics, which point to its cleverness and skill, and since it acquired all these skills only by way of inspiration (*ilhām*), which resembles the state of *wahy*, it is no wonder that God says about them 'And your Lord inspired the bee'" (R20: 57). Therefore, in his opinion, reception of *wahy* is indeed a sign of the special status of bees.

Resurrection

The possibility of nonhuman animals' resurrection is mentioned twice in the Qur'an: first in 6/al-An'ām: 38, where it is said about every *dābba* (animal) on earth and flying creature "Then to their Lord they will be gathered"; and in 81/al-Takwīr: 5, "and when the wild beasts (*al-wuḥūsh*) are herded together." In both verses, the idea of "gathering" or "herding together" is expressed with the verb *ḥashara*, which often refers to the gathering on Judgment Day (*yawm al-ḥaṣhr*).⁶⁴ In the case of humans, the main point of resurrection is accountability for deeds performed in this life followed by reward or punishment. In view of this, there seems to be a fundamental connection between resurrection and *taklif*. Humans, it is generally understood, will be questioned about whether or not they

⁶³ Giese, "Betrachtungen zur Seele der Tiere," 121.

⁶⁴ Ibn Manẓūr defines the verbal noun (*ḥaṣhr*) as the gathering of people on the Day of Judgment (s.v. ḥ-sh-r). Likewise, al-Isfahānī says that Judgment Day is also called the Day of Gathering (*yawm al-ḥaṣhr*) and the Day of Resurrection (*yawm al-ba'th wa-al-nashr*) *Mufradāt alfāz al-Qur'an al-karīm*, s.v. ḥ-sh-r.

abided by God's commands and prohibitions that they have been charged to observe in this life. This, however, does not mean that among humans only those who are *mukallaf* will be resurrected. Children who die before reaching the age of puberty and insane people are not *mukallaf*, however, they also will be resurrected, although, it is generally agreed, not for purposes of accountability. In the case of nonhuman animals, their *ḥashr* is not always taken to mean their resurrection, however, when it is, there is usually no disagreement about its purpose. Like most humans, nonhuman animals are resurrected for purposes of accountability. This section will be dedicated to an investigation of the different views about the nature, duration, and purpose of nonhuman animals' *ḥashr*; in the next section, I will turn to the related theme of *taklif*.

Nature of resurrection. The two main meanings attributed to the word *ḥashr* when it applies to nonhuman animals are death and resurrection. Ibn Kathīr, al-Ṭabarī, and al-Qurṭubī report the opinion of ibn 'Abbās who states that the *ḥashr* of nonhuman animals consists simply of their death (Ṭ5: 187; Q6: 271; IK6: 32), and another opinion stating that it consists of their resurrection and their gathering on the Judgment Day (Ṭ5: 187; Q6: 271; IK6: 33). It is not clear, however, how or why ibn 'Abbās proposes this interpretation because both etymological and contextual evidence shows that the word *ḥashr* in the Qur'an means *only* to bring together a large number of beings.⁶⁵ At any rate, al-Ṭabarī, in whose view either one of these definitions may be correct, prefers the second, that is, "that every creeping animal and every flying creature will be gathered unto God after death and after they are resurrected on Judgment Day" (Ṭ5: 188). Al-Qurṭubī, al-Rāzī, and ibn Kathīr also agree that nonhuman animals' *ḥashr* points to their gathering on the Judgment Day, which involves reward and punishment (R12: 180; Q6: 271; IK6: 35).

Duration of resurrection. Although all four exegetes agree that nonhuman animals will be resurrected and judged, their judgment is still viewed as different, in fact much less stern, than that of humans. All four say that after nonhuman animals obtain their due requitals, they will be told: "Be dust!" This is why, the exegetes explain, the disbelievers will cry: "If only

⁶⁵ In most cases, the Qur'anic notion of *ḥashr* refers to the gathering that will take place upon resurrection. On a few occasions, it refers to the gathering of people or other animals in worldly life.

I were dust!" (78/al-Naba': 40). In fact, al-Qurṭubī explains that on that Day, when nonhuman animals see humans' agony, they will exclaim: "Thank God we were not created humans, for we neither expect reward nor dread chastisement!" (Q6: 271). Although all exegetes agree that the maximum extent of nonhuman animals' accountability is fair requital after which they disappear from the afterlife scene, it is sometimes suggested that nonhuman animals will live comfortably forever in heaven, hence obtaining compensation for the wrongs done to them in this life and allowing humans to enjoy their presence; but al-Qurṭubī, who reports this opinion, rejects it (Q6: 270).

Al-Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār (d. 415/1024) from the Mu'tazili school also says that the compensation allotted to nonhuman animals is not eternal, for after they obtain their due requital God will transform them into dust.⁶⁶ Al-Rāzī, who reports this opinion, agrees with the Mu'tazili school on this point and asserts that most exegetes are of this opinion too, however, he still reports that the Mu'tazili Abū al-Qāsim al-Ka'bi al-Balkhī (d. 319/931) objected to this idea, arguing that if God caused these animals to die anew He would be inflicting on them new pain, which would require a new compensation, thus causing this process to go on endlessly. However, al-Rāzī objects that there is no evidence that causing death need only be accomplished through the infliction of pain (R12: 181).

Whereas al-Qurṭubī asserts in some contexts that nonhuman animals will be turned into dust, in another context he cites a prophetic ḥadīth stating, "The ewe is one of the animals of heaven (*al-shāt min dawābb al-janna*)" (Q4: 23).⁶⁷ Because the ewe is "one of" heaven's animals, it is perhaps justified to infer that humans and female sheep are not the only dwellers of paradise. It is also worth noting that this ḥadīth does not specify whether the origin of heavenly sheep, like that of humans, can be traced back to earthly life. Our four exegetes do not seem to hold an opinion about this matter, however, the Shāfi'ī exegete al-Māwardī (d. 450/1058) maintains that after obtaining their full compensation for the harms inflicted on them in earthly life, God will turn certain animals into dust while others will dwell in heaven, so that believers can enjoy their presence and can continue to ride them, thus indicating that heavenly animals are the ones resurrected after their earthly lives.⁶⁸ On the other hand,

⁶⁶ For more on the Mu'tazili views on animals' suffering, see Giese, "Betrachtungen zur Seele der Tiere," 115, and Heemskerck, *Suffering in the Mu'tazilite Theology*, 167–8.

⁶⁷ Ibn Māja, *Sunan*, no. 1705.

⁶⁸ Muḥammad ibn Ḥabīb al-Māwardī, *al-Nukat wa-al-'uyūn*, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1992), 112–3.

a tradition attributed to Abū Hurayra states that a specific tree in heaven will provide believers with horses and camels (Ṭ7: 382), which suggests that in the view of this companion (some?) nonhuman heavenly animals have no prior existence on earth. Interestingly, however, in both opinions the only reason nonhuman animals are given a place in heaven is the possibility to entertain (righteous) humans.

In another tradition, however, Abū Hurayra is reported to have said, “treat your sheep well (*aḥsin ilā ghanamika*), wipe the mucus running from their noses (*imsaḥ al-ru'ama 'anhā*), clean their resting places (*aṭib murāḥabā*) and pray in their whereabouts (*ṣalli fī nāḥiyatihā*) for they are among the animals of heaven.”⁶⁹ This ḥadīth clearly prioritizes the interests of sheep and emphasizes their intrinsic worth. In view of this, it is perhaps justified to deduce that sheep would deserve heavenly rewards because of their own merit rather than for being a favorite species of human beings.

Purpose of resurrection. In a view shared by the four consulted exegetes, the purpose of nonhuman animal's resurrection is their reward or punishment. The four of them quote different versions of a ḥadīth in which the Prophet is reported to have said that on the Judgment Day God's justice will reach such a point where a hornless ewe would take its due right from the ewe with horns, presumably in the case where the latter attacks the former (Ṭ5: 187; R12: 180; Q6: 271; IK6: 33).⁷⁰ However, al-Qurṭubī adds that some people reject this view and interpret this ḥadīth in a figurative sense. In this group's opinion, the point of this ḥadīth is only to exaggerate the horrors of Judgment Day, so that people would understand that no one among them can ever escape accountability at that time. The advocates of this opinion support their view with a longer version of the same ḥadīth, in which it is affirmed that even inanimate things, such as stones or twigs, will be held accountable on that Day. Because in their opinion it is unimaginable that inanimate things be held accountable, they conclude that neither such beings nor nonhuman animals will truly be resurrected. Resurrection of nonhuman animals in their view is inconceivable because their deeds, unlike those of humans, are not recorded (or because they are not *mukallaf* (Q6: 271)).⁷¹ Therefore, the advocates of this opinion deny that nonhuman animal's

⁶⁹ Mālik ibn Anas, *Al-Muwatta'* (Cairo: Jam'iyyat al-Maknaz al-Islāmī, 2001), no. 365.

⁷⁰ Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal, *Al-Musnad* (Cairo: Dār al-Ḥadīth, 1995), *Musnad 'Uthmān*, no. 520.

⁷¹ *lī'anna al-qalam lā yajri 'alayhim*.

ḥashr can have any purpose, which naturally leads them to deny this phenomenon altogether.

In their discussion of *ḥashr*, the adherents of the Mu'tazili school of *kalām*, as reported by al-Rāzī, put more emphasis on compensation than on chastisement and retaliation. They argue that the infliction of pain is an offense that entitles any victim to obtain compensation. Therefore, because it is necessary (*wājib*) to recompense nonhuman animals, their resurrection becomes a natural or logical byproduct of God's justice. Al-Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār, still according to al-Rāzī, further argues that any nonhuman animal that God has permitted humans to kill, either for the purpose of consuming its flesh or for self-defense, and any nonhuman animal that God has permitted humans to use for carrying heavy loads or to perform difficult work will receive its compensation from God directly. However, if pain is inflicted on a nonhuman animal unjustly, that is, for a purpose that God did not authorize, such as gratuitous killing, compensation will become the duty of the wrongdoer, whether a human being or another animal. Al-Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār further explains that the compensation that nonhuman animals will obtain includes benefits that are so great that if these animals were rational beings and if they knew that the only way for them to obtain such benefits was by being slaughtered, they would have willingly accepted that.

Al-Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār's view raises an important question: Does the Mu'tazili idea of absolute divine justice allow for injustice on earth in general and mistreatment of nonhuman animals in particular? Although the general implications of the principle of divine justice in the Mu'tazili school remain outside the scope of this work, in the context of nonhuman animals it is important to note that 'Abd al-Jabbār's views are motivated by two factors. The first, obviously, is his insistence on God's absolute justice, which is one of the five central principles (*al-uṣūl al-khamsa*) in this school; and the second is his unease with the explicit permission to use certain animals for certain purposes, most importantly among them the possibility of killing certain animals for food. This permission in 'Abd al-Jabbār's view seems to be inconsistent with God's absolute justice, as there is no apparent (rational?) reason why God would allow certain beings to suffer to satisfy the needs or desires of others (regardless of the possible superiority of some to others).⁷² A slightly less difficult

⁷² Giese notes that some Mu'tazili scholars (such as al-Nazzām) seem to emphasize the suffering of nonhuman animals even more than that of humans. "Betrachtungen zur Seele der Tiere," 115. See also Heemskerck, *Suffering in the Mu'tazilite Theology*, 187–9.

question is why God would create some creatures as disadvantaged so that others could abuse them (i.e., humans unjustly taking advantage of nonhuman animals). Being a staunch defender of the principle of God's justice, 'Abd al-Jabbār had to address both questions. For the uses that God has allowed, He will compensate for them in such a way that non-human animals will be fully satisfied, to the point that if they were given the choice – had they been aware of the entire picture from the beginning and capable of appreciating it – they would have chosen what God has chosen for them. As for the fact that God has apparently put nonhuman animals at a disadvantage vis-à-vis humans, 'Abd al-Jabbār seems to be arguing that this should not be interpreted as a sanction to misuse non-human animals, for any such misuse is going to be answered for in the hereafter. In view of this, 'Abd al-Jabbār is clearly trying to reconcile the idea of God's justice with the apparent injustices that take place on earth. In my opinion, however, the clear emphasis he lays on the idea of accountability in the afterlife for wrongs committed against nonhuman animals serves more as a deterrent from committing such wrongs than as a justification for an attitude of resignation to injustices and even less as a sanction to abuse nonhuman animals.

Al-Rāzī, being an Ash'arī, does not agree with al-Qāḍī 'Abd al-Jabbār's line of reasoning and supports his own opinion with two arguments. First, he considers that God is perfect, and nothing He does, be it considered from the human viewpoint as good or bad, could diminish His perfection, for what is perfect and complete in itself cannot logically be affected by anything external. Because for him, as for other Ash'aris, there is no room for *taḥṣīn* and *taqbiḥ* 'aqli (the human mind's unaided qualification of things as good or bad), the fact that God has sanctioned certain uses of other animals cannot be considered as something bad that needs to be justified or accounted for. Things, as explained earlier, do not have an objective or inherent quality of goodness or badness, but rather require a *dalil sam'ī* (scriptural evidence) to apprise us of their ethical value. Therefore, the simple fact that God has sanctioned certain uses of other animals makes these uses good. As such, God is not obligated to compensate nonhuman animals. In fact, to believe that it is incumbent on Him to make up for nonhuman animals' (or even humans') suffering on this earth would compromise His freedom. Al-Rāzī, as we have already mentioned, still believes that nonhuman animals will be resurrected, however, this is not a matter of obligation, but rather a matter of will and grace. God will resurrect nonhuman animals, reward or punish them because He chooses to do so.

Therefore, although it is suggested that the *ḥashr* of nonhuman animals may consist simply of their death, the more accepted idea among the consulted exegetes and a number of other Muslim authorities whom they cite is that nonhuman animals will be resurrected and judged, an idea that is furthermore supported by the etymological meaning and contextual use of the word. Even if their judgment is much less severe than that of humans, and even if nonhuman animals are not granted eternal life, as our exegetes tend to affirm, the mere assumption that they will be judged has, in my opinion, considerable bearing on their status, as it indicates that nonhuman animals could be perceived as responsible beings, which, again, suggests that they could, in some ways, be considered *mukallaf*.

Taklīf

The centrality of *taklīf* to the status of nonhuman animals in Islamic tradition has become clearer from the foregoing discussion. In fact, the tendency to minimize the significance of many Qur'anic animal themes often boils down to this key concept. For example, al-Rāzī builds his case for the figurative interpretation of the so-called nonrational creatures' *tasbīḥ*, first, on a lack of life, which does not apply to nonhuman animals, and, second, on a lack of rational faculties, which he denies to nonhuman animals because attributing rationality to them would entail *taklīf*, a possibility that is ruled out based on the consensus of the *umma* (*ijmā'*, R22: 173). Likewise, the opinion cited by al-Qurṭubī, which rejects the possibility of nonhuman animals' (and other so-called nonrational creatures') resurrection and interprets the hornless/horned ewes ḥadīth in a figurative sense, begins by bringing up the element of life (in the case of twigs and stones), and then *taklīf*, which is denied to nonhuman animals because "*al-qalam lā yajrī 'alayhim*" (their deeds are not recorded for accountability purposes; Q6: 271). Similarly, the exemption of nonhuman animals from moral responsibility comes down to the same argument. Nonhuman animals' acts cannot be morally qualified because they are not *mukallaf*. It is, therefore, indispensable to discuss this concept not only to understand the reasons behind this insistence on keeping nonhuman animals outside of its perimeter, but also to see if indeed this insistence is fully justified.

Definition of *taklīf*. In al-Ghazālī's definition, *taklīf* means "to require [someone] to do [something] in which she/he finds hardship (*al-ḥaml 'alā mā fī fī'lihi mashaqqā*)." Therefore, "commandments and prohibitions [in religion] fall under *taklīf* (*yandarij taḥtahu al-ijāb wa-al-ḥaḍr*)."

Furthermore, *taklif* does not correspond to that “which [human] nature likes or dislikes (*lā wifqa mā yatashawwafu ilayhi al-ṭab‘ aw yanbū ‘anhu*).” In some of the opinions al-Ghazālī cites, it is maintained also that acts that are recommended (*mandūb*) and acts that are permissible (*mubāh*) fall under *taklif*, but al-Ghazālī disagrees with these opinions.⁷³

Perhaps the most important question that is asked in the context of *taklif* is whether God would impose that which is unbearable or which cannot be met (*taklif mā lā yuṭāq*) on those who are obligated to observe His commandments and prohibitions. Although al-Ghazālī cites different views on this question, he is convinced that one of the prerequisites of *taklif* is *qudra*, that is, capability (to comply with the commands). He explains that “religious law (*al-shar‘*) imposes only that which is within the capacity of the party to whom the law is applicable. This is clear (*bayyin*) in the sources of religious law and in the promises and threats [of reward and punishment]. In any case,” he adds, “it is pointless to assign punishment or reward to certain acts when it is equally impossible to perform any of them.”⁷⁴

Who is *mukallaf*? Making *taklif* contingent on *qudra* (capability) serves mainly to decide who is addressed by religious law. *Qudra* is not limited to the physical ability to meet God’s commands and prohibitions, but extends to, or in fact begins with, the ability to comprehend such rules. If a certain party does not have the mental capacity that would allow it to understand God’s commands, requiring that party to abide by them would amount to requiring that which cannot be done. Therefore, children before the age of puberty, insane people, those who are in a state of sleep or distraction (*al-nā‘im wa-al-sāhī*), and even someone who is drunk (at least in the opinion of al-Ghazālī) are not *mukallaf* while in these states, however, as soon as they reach puberty, return to sanity, wake up from sleep, or become alert or sober, they become *mukallaf* anew.⁷⁵ Obviously, nonhuman animals are not *mukallaf* with regard to the precepts of religion on the grounds that they cannot make sense of them.

What ensue from the presence of *taklif* are both reward and punishment, or at least praiseworthiness and blameworthiness (because, unlike the Mu‘tazilis, in the view of Ash‘arīs and other traditionalists God can

⁷³ Abū Ḥamid al-Ghazālī, *al-Mankhūl min ta‘līqāt al-uṣūl* (Damascus: Dār al-Fikr, 1980, second edition), 21.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 22–7.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 30.

still forgive those who fail to meet his commandments and prohibitions). Furthermore, whereas a number of violations of God's commands are punishable only in the hereafter, many others are punishable in this life as well. Therefore, one of the major aims of delimiting the scope of *taklif* is to protect those who do not meet its requirements from suffering the legal consequences of certain acts that would otherwise have resulted in their legal accountability. In the case of nonhuman animals, a ḥadīth stating that "damage caused by a dumb creature is of no account (*al-ʿajmā' jurḥuhā jubār*)"⁷⁶ is interpreted not only as freeing nonhuman animals of the consequences of the injuries they may cause, but in some circumstances as freeing their owners as well. Al-Qurṭubī explains that in the opinion of "Abū Ḥanīfa and his school ... if a domestic animal damages someone's property, whether during daytime or at night, the owner is entirely free from any responsibility." Al-Qurṭubī does not agree with this opinion. In his opinion, the owner of a domestic animal does not assume the liability for the damage caused by his/her animals only during daytime because during that time the protection of property falls on its owner. By contrast, if domestic animals cause damage to someone else's property at night, their owners need to compensate for that damage because it is the responsibility of animals' owners to make sure that their livestock have no access to other people's property during the night (Q11: 209). Therefore, as a result of their non-*taklif*, in all circumstances, domestic animals themselves do not bear the consequences of any damage they may cause.

In the light of this, it seems that the insistence on keeping nonhuman animals outside the boundaries of *taklif* is primarily motivated by a protective attitude rather than a desire to relegate them to an inferior status. Nonetheless, freeing nonhuman animals from the consequences of *taklif* and denying them any type of responsibility appears to have been one of the main causes for their inferior status.

What is particularly noteworthy about nonhuman animals' lack of *taklif* is that it seems inconsistent with the idea of their resurrection and retribution in the hereafter. If nonhuman animals are not *mukallaf* at all, then why would God reward or punish them for deeds they performed in this life? This theme, as we have already seen, emerges from some readings of the Qur'an (the verses dealing with nonhuman animals' *ḥashr*) and more clearly so in the ḥadīth stating that a hornless sheep will receive its due from the horned one that attacks it in this life. Although there is

⁷⁶ Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, *al-Diyāt*, no. 6998.

a tendency to interpret the Qur'anic verses and – to a lesser extent – the ḥadīth in question in a way as to rule out nonhuman animals' resurrection and accountability, all our exegetes and many of the authorities they cite agree that nonhuman animals' *ḥashr* indeed consists of their resurrection followed by some form of reward or punishment.

Strangely, most of our exegetes fail to address this intricate point. Al-Rāzī, while asserting that nonhuman animals' *ḥashr* refers to their resurrection and accountability, dedicates most of his commentaries on the *ḥashr* verses to the discussion of the Mu'tazili views with the aim of refuting their claim that God is obligated to compensate for nonhuman animals' undeserved suffering in this life. About the purpose of nonhuman animals' *ḥashr* itself, he says, "All animals will be resurrected in order that God's justice will be manifest (*izhāran li-al-'adl*). In this case, how would it be conceivable that those who are *mukallaf* among humans and jinn will not be resurrected?" (R31: 63). Because nonhuman animals' resurrection serves to illustrate God's justice, then this seems to imply that in al-Rāzī's opinion they will be judged and rewarded or punished for the deeds they perform in this life, which suggests that at least a type of accountability applies to them. On the other hand, by contrasting them to those who are *mukallaf*, it appears that in al-Rāzī's opinion nonhuman animals are not *mukallaf*. Al-Rāzī might be suggesting that nonhuman animals' accountability is milder than that of humans and jinn, however, this is not clear from his discussion. Likewise, al-Ṭabarī and ibn Kathīr, who understand nonhuman animals' *ḥashr* as their resurrection, do not try to reconcile these two points.

In contrast with this, in his refutation of the opinion that insists on understanding the resurrection and accountability of nonhuman animals in a figurative sense, al-Qurṭubī says, "The true interpretation is the first [literal] one based on Abū Hurayra's ḥadīth [about the horned/hornless sheep]. While it is true that they [nonhuman animals] are not required to follow the precepts of [human] law (*wa-in kāna al-qalamu lā yajrī 'alayhim fī al-aḥkām*), they are still held accountable for the things that take place among them (*fīmā baynahum yu'ākbadhūn*)" (Q6: 271). Therefore, nonhuman animals are not *mukallaf* in that they are not required to observe laws that are laid down for humans, perhaps not only because they cannot grasp these laws, but also because such laws are not relevant to their experiences. However, this does not mean that they are fully exempt from any sort of accountability. Al-Qurṭubī does not expressly say whether such accountability can be perceived as a kind of *taklīf*, that is, whether nonhuman animals have been specifically charged to observe certain norms

in dealing with other animals, however, their accountability in the after-life seems to argue for this. If nonhuman animals are indeed *mukallaf*, we do not know also how their *taklif* is communicated to them. Although it is suggested, as we have seen, that they have prophets among them, which further suggests that they receive their messages in the way humans do, this idea is hardly accepted in the mainstream tradition, however, and is not corroborated by any explicit textual evidence from the Qur'an or the ḥadīth. However, the fact that the Qur'an does not inform us of the exact nature of nonhuman animals' *taklif* and how this *taklif* is communicated to them can be explained again by the fact that this text is not mainly for or about nonhuman animals, but rather for humans and about issues that are relevant to them. Nonetheless, the mere fact that nonhuman animals are expected to "live up to a standard of some kind," as Waldau notes, "has positive ... implications for [their] abilities."⁷⁷

Perspective

Perhaps the most arresting feature of animal themes in the Qur'an is the presence of the voices of certain nonhuman animals, which gives us the opportunity to see things – albeit briefly – from these nonhuman animals' perspectives. Obviously, allowing an ant or a hoopoe to speak in their own voices is quite significant, for in addition to familiarizing us with their viewpoints, quoting them directly tells us that they, and perhaps by extension all other animals, have voices worthy of being heard and views worthy of being quoted, thus showing in distinct terms the important status nonhuman animals enjoy in the Qur'an. Among the things that the speeches of the hoopoe and the ant reveal is that in the same way that humans hold opinions about other animals, other animals also have their own views of humans. Remarkably also, in the same way that humans may feel superior to other animals, many indications in the speeches of the nonhuman animals quoted in the Qur'an suggest that in some ways they also feel superior to humans. Moreover, just as humans sometimes find some nonhuman animals' behaviors inexplicable, other animals in the Qur'an seem to experience the same amazement vis-à-vis some behaviors of human beings.

When the ant qualifies Solomon's possible aggression with the adverb *unperceiving*, it suggests that from its perspective, its knowledge is more detailed than that of humans, because it believes that it knows about

⁷⁷ Waldau, *The Specter of Speciesism*, 141.

humans' actions and even their hidden intentions, whereas it does not expect the human beings in this scene to be aware even of its own existence or of the existence of its entire colony. The ant turns out to be wrong because Solomon was not only aware of the existence of its colony, but could even understand its speech, something the ant did not expect. This inaccuracy, however, should hardly be counted against this insect, for had Solomon, a prophet, not been given the miraculous ability of understanding the languages of nonhuman animals, its viewpoint would have remained valid. In fact, despite its inaccuracy in this particular situation, the ant's viewpoint remains valid for all of humanity except, perhaps, prophets, which could imply a criticism of most humans for their indifference to nonhuman animals' suffering.

Besides, this inaccuracy did not prevent the ant's view from being presented in the Qur'an. This could be an effective way of showing the merit of the Prophet Solomon, whose sound character had become so renowned that even nonhuman animals knew about it. However, another point could also be that the Qur'an wants to tell humans that this ant, and perhaps by extension all other animals, has its own view about other creatures, including humans. Moreover, these views do not have to be right to deserve to be cited in the Qur'an. Nonhuman animals can be less than perfect, however, they can still have space allotted to them in this text.

The hoopoe's more detailed address presents it not only as having its own opinion and assessment of situations, but also of being very confident about them. In full self-assurance, it tells Solomon that it knows what he knows not, hence showing anew that from their own perspective, nonhuman animals may feel superior to humans in some aspects of knowledge. Moreover, unlike the ant, the hoopoe's judgment proves to be accurate and its report highly valuable, which suggests that from the Qur'anic perspective nonhuman animals – or at least some of them – are hardly the dumb creatures humans consider them to be.

The perplexity the hoopoe displays about the people of Sheba's misguidance is another remarkable point. The fact that only God should be worshipped seems so obvious to this bird that it cannot understand how anyone could possibly fail to see it. Also, it is interesting that the hoopoe's statement suggests that its trust in the validity of its point emanates more from rational evidence than from instinctive knowledge that God cast directly in its soul, as the exegetes claim. The hoopoe argues that God is the only one who is worthy of being worshipped because He is the One Who "brings forth the hidden in the heavens and the earth, and knows

what you hide and what you proclaim" (27/al-Naml: 25). Therefore, the hoopoe's knowledge of this divine attribute has led it to the knowledge of God, or at least to appreciate God's majesty and greatness. Being itself an expert in seeing what is hidden under the ground, as the exegetes agree, the hoopoe is particularly well situated to appreciate the divine attribute of bringing forth that which is hidden. Because humans are likely to know God from different angles or by experiencing other divine attributes (other than the one mentioned by the hoopoe), the point of citing this bird's argument does not seem to be the persuasion of humans of God's existence or greatness; rather, it is to show that this bird possesses the capacity for rational analysis that helped it reach its spiritual convictions, or at least support its views on hidden matters.

The hoopoe's perplexity toward this inexplicable human behavior is reminiscent of human perplexity toward some animal behaviors, such as al-Rāzī's perplexity in the anecdote about his own experience with the camel in the desert (cited earlier). Al-Rāzī's astonishment shows his inability to understand what was occurring in the camel's mind, just as the hoopoe was unable to understand what was occurring in the minds of the people of Sheba. One of the main differences between the two situations, however, is that the Qur'an endorses the hoopoe's viewpoint about the inexplicability of the behavior of the people of Sheba, whereas the presentation of the animal themes discussed hardly endorses al-Rāzī's views about nonhuman animals.

None of the consulted exegetes explicitly points to the importance of nonhuman animals' possession of their own voices or perspectives in the Qur'an, however, al-Qurṭubī, as if under the effect of this theme, reports a large number of maxims supposedly articulated by nonhuman animals, as well as conversations that allegedly took place between birds and Solomon, presenting nonhuman animals as having their own voices and viewpoints. In one of these anecdotes, al-Qurṭubī reports that Solomon once passed by a hoopoe and saw that a child had placed a trap to catch it. Upon being warned of the child's trap, the hoopoe said: "Oh Prophet of God, this is just a mindless child whom I like to tease." However, when Solomon came back to the same place, he found the hoopoe caught in the trap and asked how this happened. The hoopoe answered, "I only saw it after I got caught in it." Solomon expressed his amazement because the hoopoe is supposed to be able to see the things that are hidden under the ground. In a resigned tone, the hoopoe replied that when something is destined to happen, one fails to see it happening. Like the hoopoe quoted in the Qur'an, this one also holds an opinion about the human being

with whom it deals, which it expresses in an even more straightforward way, when it characterizes the child as “mindless.” Unlike the hoopoe in the Qur'anic scene, however, this one proves to be, and admits to being, wrong, or at least admits to being subject to fate like any other creature. In my opinion, however, in both the Qur'an's and al-Qurṭubī's treatment of the topic of animals' perspectives, the point is not to show the validity or invalidity of their opinions, but rather to show that nonhuman animals, like humans, have their own views of things, which may be right or wrong. Their possession and expression of these opinions serve, however, to show the relativity of matters, of which the human beings do not seem to be fully aware. This world, of which humans generally tend to feel they are the focal point, may look different to other creatures.

Although some of the birds discussed by al-Qurṭubī may point to these animals' limitations, most of the birds and other animals he quotes are highly spiritual, wise, and knowledgeable. For example, al-Qurṭubī reports that a dove once cooed close to Solomon, who informed his companions that it said, “I wish these creatures were never created. Yet since they are created, I wish they understood the purpose of their creation.” A swallow, advised other creatures to “do good deeds beforehand so that they can reap good results” (Q13: 112). Swallows also supposedly know a number of Qur'anic passages. In a ḥadīth attributed to the Prophet it is related that “when the rooster crows it says, ‘remember God, oh you heedless ones!’”⁷⁸ In fact, many of these birds display ascetical qualities, and most of them are insightful. This clearly shows al-Qurṭubī's propensity to idealize non-human animals, a propensity also clear in his discussion of Solomon's ant. Al-Qurṭubī, however, like our other exegetes, is hardly consistent in this respect. Although his tendency to present nonhuman animals in a markedly positive light is very clear, sometimes going so far as to make them look superior to many humans, in other situations he does not hesitate to reiterate negative and stereotypical views about them.

Evaluation of the exegetes' views

This is perhaps the time to reflect more generally on our exegetes' approaches to certain animal themes in the Qur'an. At first glance, it may seem that al-Ṭabarī, ibn Kathīr, and al-Qurṭubī form one group that

⁷⁸ Al-Qurṭubī attributes this ḥadīth to the Prophet, but Abū al-Shaykh al-Aṣbahānī's (d. 369/979) chain of *isnād* does not reach him (the Prophet). Abū al-Shaykh al-Aṣbahānī, *Kitāb al-ʿazāma* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1994) no. 1231; (Q13: 112).

stands in opposition to al-Rāzī, considering that they generally opt for literal interpretations of the Qur'anic animal themes and are hardly bothered by what may seem to be fantastic portrayals of nonhuman animals (and other creatures) in the text, whereas al-Rāzī, typically and consistently appears as a rationalist who insists on passing Qur'anic depictions of nonhuman animals and other creatures through the filter of reason.⁷⁹ A deeper look, however, reveals that al-Qurṭubī is more of a rationalist than he first appears, whereas al-Rāzī's approach depends on a rationalism that is deeply colored by presuppositions of Neoplatonic thought.

Al-Qurṭubī's rationalism appears, for example, in the way he handles the theme of nonhuman animals' language. Unlike al-Ṭabarī and ibn Kathīr, he is not content to accept the literal meaning of the Qur'an in this respect merely on grounds of faith, but rather seeks to explain the phenomenon in rational terms. One of the reasons some people seem to find difficulty believing that ants may possess a language is that they limit language to acoustic communication. This is noticeable in the attitude of those who exaggerate the size of Solomon's ant to justify its possession of a voice that would allow it to issue speech. Al-Qurṭubī, however, does not agree that a language must necessarily be acoustic. Because the knowledge that has become available to us today about the different methods of nonhuman animals' communication was not available at his time,⁸⁰ al-Qurṭubī had to resort to the only type of non-acoustic language that he knew, the concept of *al-kalām al-naḥsī* (mental speech). He supports his point of view first by quoting al-Naḥḥās' definition of the word *manṭiq* (anything that can be understood, without necessarily being issued in words), and second by analyzing the situation in which someone has in

⁷⁹ About al-Rāzī's rationalism, see for example Shalahudin Kafrawi, who says: "According to him [al-Rāzī], both revelation and reason are the sources of knowledge; neither one negates the other. However, when there seems to be conflict between the two, he argues, reason should be given priority. This is because the validation of the scriptural evidence depends on the validity of rational demonstration." Shalahuddin Kafrawi, "Fakhr al-Din al-Rāzī's Sources of Ta'wil: Between Revelation and Reason." *Islamic Quarterly*, 43, 2 (1999): 191. See also Roger Arnaldez, *Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī Commentateur du Coran et philosophe* (Paris: J. Vrin, 2002), 126.

⁸⁰ About acoustic, visual, and olfactory communication among nonhuman animals, see M. Naguib, "Animal Communication: Overview," in *Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics* (second edition), 1: 276–284; about infrasonic communication among elephants, see Katherine B. Payne, William R. Langbauer, Jr., Elizabeth M. Thomas, "Infrasonic Calls of the Asian Elephant (*Elephas Maximus*)," *Behavioral Ecology and Sociobiology*, vol. 18, no. (1986), 297–301; about bee's dance language, see Tania Munz, "The Bee Battles: Karl von Frisch, Adrian Wenner and the Honey Bee Dance Language Controversy," *Journal of the History of Biology* (2005) 38, 535–570.

mind “words or speeches” that are not articulated out loud. Therefore, a language does not necessarily need to be acoustic. Although in his view this form of language usually lacks the element of communication, on exceptional occasions, he points out, this rule did not apply. This happened for instance when the Prophet was miraculously able to know what went on in some people’s minds although they did not utter a word about it. Therefore, one may infer that Solomon was able miraculously to access nonhuman animals’ languages in the same way the Prophet Muḥammad was able to access the unspoken ideas of some people. Al-Qurṭubī does not resolve how these animals communicate among themselves, does not specify the nature of nonhuman animals’ language, neither does he give a rational proof that it truly exists, however, his proposed analysis at least rules out the impossibility of its existence and makes it easier for his reader to accept his opinions about nonhuman animals on rational grounds.

As for al-Rāzī, as already noted, he bases his argument for animals’ lack of linguistic skills mainly on the grounds of *taklīf*. For him, possession of language presumes possession of rational faculties, a state that in his opinion automatically results in the imposition of religious precepts on a rational creature. However, there is consensus among the *umma*, he argues, that nonhuman animals are not *mukallaf*, which, by his line of reasoning, precludes the possibility that nonhuman animals have rational faculties and languages. This, in fact, makes his whole argument rest on *ijmāʿ* (consensus), rather than logical argumentation (or scripture), because if logical consistency were the main or the only basis for his idea, his argument would become circular (nonhuman animals are not *mukallaf* because they are not rational, and they are not rational because they are not *mukallaf*). Al-Rāzī’s argument suffers from a number of weaknesses. First, he himself admits that a creature may have rational faculties and language without being *mukallaf*, as is the case with human adolescents and the birds that glorified God along with the Prophet David or that served in the Prophet Solomon’s army. Therefore, possessing a language and being rational do not necessarily have to be accompanied by *taklīf*. Consequently, according to al-Rāzī’s own logic, it is possible that all nonhuman animals reach the rational level of human adolescents, just as was the case with Solomon’s and David’s birds. Al-Rāzī rules out this possibility, however, without providing evidence to support his view. Second, although he asserts that there is consensus among the *umma* that nonhuman animals are not *mukallaf*, he, much like the other consulted exegetes, asserts that nonhuman animals will be held accountable

in the afterlife for their deeds in this life, which suggests that some sort of accountability applies to them, even if it differs greatly from the *taklif* of humans. Moreover, although it is generally true that the *umma* has reached consensus on nonhuman animals' lack of *taklif*, the principle in the opinion of some scholars (such as al-Qurṭubī) is still nuanced.

Al-Rāzī's general resistance to attribute any significant mental or linguistic complexity to nonhuman animals seems to stem more from Neoplatonic influence – particularly the concept of the Great Chain of Being – than from purely rational considerations. This influence can be discerned for example in his continual preoccupation with hierarchical arrangements, in a way reminiscent of Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'. To cite a few examples, in the case of sciences or intellectual disciplines, he asks which of them is nobler or superior to others and engages in a long discussion to prove – both through rational argumentation and interpretation of scriptural evidence – that the discipline of *uṣūl al-fiqh* (principles of jurisprudence) is the noblest (R2: 79–80). In his attempt to account for the choice of the word *face* in “whosoever surrenders his face to God while doing good, his reward is with his Lord” (2/al-Baqara: 112), he explains that the choice of the face is justified by the fact that it is superior to all other body members (R4: 144). Likewise, in his explanation of why there is mention of palm trees and vines in particular in 2/al-Baqara: 266, he states that these two fruits are superior to all other fruits (R7: 52).⁸¹

About the Chain of Being per se, Binyamin Abrahamov observes,

Very probably being influenced by the doctrine of Iḥwān al-Ṣafā', al-Rāzī regards the genus of the bodies which are composed of the four elements (sing. *al-ġism al-^ḥunṣurī*) as divided into three species: minerals, plants, and animals. Every species of this hierarchy – in which minerals are the lowest, animals are the highest, and plants in between – is in turn a genus which is divided into many species, the noblest of which is the species of man.⁸²

In al-Rāzī's opinion, this hierarchical arrangement can even serve to prove the existence of angels, whom, predictably, he considers superior to humans (R2: 148). In his classification of earthly animals he says,

Know that the most noble (*ashraf*) bodies in the sublunary world (*al-^ḥalam al-^ḥsufli*) after the human being are the bodies of other animals, as they possess noble faculties (*li-ikhtiṣāṣihā bi-al-quwā al-sharīfa*), which are inner and outer

⁸¹ Al-Qurṭubī gives the same reason to account for the choice of these two types of fruits (Q3207). However, the same general preoccupation with hierarchical arrangements can hardly be perceived in al-Qurṭubī's *tafsīr*.

⁸² Binyamin Abrahamov, “Religion Versus Philosophy: The Case of Faḥr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's Proofs for Prophecy,” *Oriente Moderno*, 80, 3 (2000): 419.

senses (*al-ḥawāss al-zāhira wa-al-bāṭina*), appetite (*al-shahwa*), and irascibility (*al-ghaḍab*). These animals can be divided into two categories, those which benefit humans and those which do not. The first category is superior to the second, because humans are superior to other animals, and consequently that which benefits them is superior to that which does not. Among the first category, we find that there are animals which humans can use to satisfy their necessary needs, such as food and clothing, and those which can be used for luxuries, such as ornaments and other uses. The first of these two categories is superior to the second. This category consists of *an'ām*, and this is why God singled them out in this verse. (16/al-Naḥl: 5; R19: 181)

Therefore, even if his hierarchical arrangement differs from that of Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', his preoccupation with hierarchical arrangement is still obvious.

Al-Rāzī's presuppositions about the nature and status of various beings, however, have presented him with a number of difficulties in his treatment of certain Qur'anic themes, and occasionally he seems to have failed to account even for some phenomena that he experienced personally. As has been already pointed out a number of times, the Qur'an often attributes what appears to be like rational features to the so-called nonrational beings. For example, stones in this text feel fear of God (2/al-Baqara: 74), skins may witness against their owners (41/Fuṣṣilat: 21), and the earth and heavens receive divine commands that they willingly obey (41/Fuṣṣilat: 11). When dealing with such Qur'anic themes, al-Rāzī usually has one of three positions. The more general one is that he interprets such verses figuratively. As an example of this, he takes the divine command to the earth to swallow its water and to the sky to be cleared of its clouds after the flood in which Noah's people were drowned (11/Hūd: 44) to be only a stylistic feature, the point of which is to "impress God's greatness and majesty on the human imagination" (R17: 187). In other situations, he grants that such phenomena may exist, but only on an exceptional basis, as miracles. For example, when he deals with God's manifestation of Himself to the mountain (7/al-A'rāf: 143),⁸³ upon which the latter was crushed, and with God's command to the hills to echo David's psalms of praise (34/Saba': 10), he accepts that God miraculously created life, mind, and understanding in these inanimate creatures and gave the mountain the faculty of seeing. In this case, he goes so far as to refute the Mu'tazili view, which, as he informs us, insists on interpreting even these verses figuratively (R14: 179). Sometimes, however, he just expresses his amazement at such Qur'anic statements (or animal

⁸³ This divine manifestation to the mountain was occasioned by Moses' request to see God.

behaviors that he experienced personally, such as the camel anecdote, cited earlier) without attempting to provide an explanation. For example, when he discusses 16/al-Naḥl: 68–9, which deal with bees, he notices a number of “amazing” features of this species that “point to [bees] great cleverness and skill, which justifies the divine address ‘And your Lord inspired the bee ’” (R20: 56–7). Likewise, in a comment on the earth’s and the heavens’ obedience to God he says: “there are amazing secrets in this [statement]” (R8: 108).⁸⁴

His assertion that Solomon’s birds were miraculously given language and a level of understanding is also hardly persuasive. As noted, the Qur’anic phrasing indicates that birds’ language is a constant matter, and that the miraculous element in this episode is the fact that Solomon was taught their language. It is to be noted also that in his discussion of Moses’ ability to hear and understand the worm he found inside three rocks (discussed earlier), he explains that Moses was able to understand what this worm said because “the veil was lifted off his hearing (*rufīʿa al-ḥijābu ʿan samʿi Mūsā*),” hence, in this context appearing as more accepting of the possibility that nonhuman animals have actual languages that are not accessible to humans because of the latter’s general inability to decipher them. A possible reason for being more accepting of this possibility here could be that al-Rāzī was dealing more casually with this theme. Despite occasional inconsistencies, however, al-Rāzī’s views are still more internally consistent than those of our other exegetes.

Furthermore, al-Rāzī is not as categorical in rejecting the idea of nonhuman animals’ possession of languages and rational faculties as ibn Ḥazm. In a section titled “*al-Baḥṭhu ʿan nufūsi sāʿiri al-ḥayawānāt*” (Investigation Concerning the Souls of all Animals) in *al-Maṭālib al-ʿāliya*, al-Rāzī examines this question in considerable depth. He starts by citing the two major opinions in this respect, which are the opinion of *al-falāsifa al-mutaʾakḥḥirūn*, that is, Muslims who espouse Neoplatonic views, and *sāʿir al-nās* (lit, other people), that is, those who do not espouse these views. In the opinion of the first group, al-Rāzī tells us, what proves that nonhuman animals have no rational faculties is that if they had such faculties without them benefiting from this state, this situation would become pointless, which does not fit the concept of the Wise Creator. The reason nonhuman animals are perceived as not benefiting from rational

⁸⁴ Elsewhere al-Rāzī gives a figurative interpretation of this verse (7/al-Aʿraf: 83), however, it is still noteworthy that he also admits that such Qur’anic themes contain “amazing secrets.”

faculties in the view of this group is that “they do not avoid bad deeds” (*lā taḥtarizu ‘an al-af‘ali al-qabiḥa*). What this group means is that because nonhuman animals perform many acts which, by human standards, are considered immoral, this shows that they have no mental faculties that would have indicated to them the unacceptability of such acts. Clearly, then, it is by applying human moral standards to other animals that this group reaches the conclusion that other animals have no rational faculties at all.

In response to this, al-Rāzī tells us, the opposing group asserts that nonhuman animals have (a considerable measure?) of rational faculties based both on empirical observations and scriptural evidence. As far as empirical observations are concerned, al-Rāzī not only gives a long list of the behaviors pointing to nonhuman animals’ intelligence, but also derives conclusions from these descriptions, which affirm that these animals actually think. For example, he states that “a mouse will insert its tail in a bottle containing fat, and then lick it.” Al-Rāzī concludes that this behavior indicates that this mouse “(1) knows that it needs fat, (2) that it cannot insert its head inside the bottle, (3) that it can insert its tail, and (4), that by inserting its tail it can reach its ultimate goal (i.e. obtaining fat).”⁸⁵ He also asserts that ants store their provisions and that the reason they do this is because “they know that there will be a time when they will need food yet food will become inaccessible.”⁸⁶ Furthermore, when ants feel humidity in their anthills, in addition to splitting grains (in the way described earlier), they also take their food stores to the open air and expose them to sunlight to dry them out.⁸⁷ He adds that when ants start taking their food back inside anthills, this indicates that there will be a change in weather conditions. Such behavior, al-Rāzī comments, “proves that this small animal has great intelligence (*dhakā’ aẓīm*).”⁸⁸ In his discussion of spiders’ weaving of their webs, he says, “these processes are mental (*hādhibi al-af‘al fikriyya*) and they are in no way inferior to human ideas (*laysat aqall min al-afkār al-insāniyya*).”⁸⁹ In addition to these empirical observations, al-Rāzī also cites the different Qur’anic verses that deal with nonhuman animals’ language and other signs of intelligence,

⁸⁵ Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Al-Maṭālib al-‘āliya min al-‘ilm al-ilābi* (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-‘Arabi, 1987), 7: 303–4.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 304–5.

⁸⁷ For more on this point, see Hölldobler and Wilson, *The Ants*, 374–81.

⁸⁸ Al-Rāzī, *Al-Maṭālib al-‘āliya*, 7: 305.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

with which the second group corroborates their opinion that nonhuman animals have rational faculties.⁹⁰

After citing both opinions and going into much detail to illustrate the view that ascribes intelligence to nonhuman animals, al-Rāzī concludes that “there are different degrees of knowledge ... If being rational means knowing all the sciences that are known to human beings, then other animals are not rational. However, if being rational corresponds to having certain types of knowledge, then it is clear that [other animals] do have these types of knowledge.” His concluding remark, however, is that to hold a final stand on this matter is not possible, because this is a matter of the unseen (*al-ghayb*), and the only one who knows the unseen is God.⁹¹

Al-Rāzī is not the only one whose views of other animals are not static. Al-Qurṭubī also holds a number of conflicting views about them, however, whereas in al-Rāzī's case his views seem to have evolved over time, al-Qurṭubī's views seem to depend mostly on contextual factors. Al-Qurṭubī's inconsistencies are noticeable in his treatment of the questions of nonhuman animals' rationality, accountability, and morality. About the first, although he sometimes presents nonhuman animals as spiritually and psychologically complex beings whose mental capacities may even be superior to those of some humans, on other occasions he falls back into certain assumptions about them that he does not endeavor to justify. For example, he asserts that God bestowed on “all [nonhuman] animals (*sā'ir al-hayawān*) the kind of subtle knowledge that some superior [human] minds can hardly grasp” (Q13: 126). Likewise, in his commentary on the *sura* 87/al-A'lā: 3,⁹² which deals with God's guidance (of His creation), al-Qurṭubī says, “[God's] inspirations to beasts, birds, vermin, pests, and reptiles (*hawāmm*) is a vast topic (*bāb wāsi'*) and an unfathomable subject. No description can do justice to it” (Q20: 13).

In contrast with these statements, which imply that nonhuman animals are mentally complex beings possessing not only practical knowledge of what benefits them in this life, but also abstract knowledge of spiritual ideas (such as the notion of God's oneness), in other contexts al-Qurṭubī presents them as having hardly any knowledge or mental complexity, or at least the same certainty about their knowledge is considerably reduced. For example, in his commentary on 25/al-Furqān: 44

⁹⁰ Ibid., 309.

⁹¹ Al-Rāzī, *Al-Maṭālib al-ʿaliya*, 303–11.

⁹² “Who measures, then guides.”

in which disbelievers are compared to *an'ām*, he states, "It is said that even if beasts (*al-bahā'im*) do not grasp the notions of [God's] oneness and prophethood, they, nonetheless, do not believe in the invalidity of these notions" (Q13: 26). Therefore, in this context al-Qurṭubī does not appear to attribute to nonhuman animals the same abstract knowledge that he confidently ascribed to them in another context. Elsewhere, he also perceives an analogy between disbelievers and "the beast which has no mind (*al-bahīma allatī lā ta'qil*)" (Q16: 163) and maintains that *an'ām*'s sole (or main) preoccupation is the satisfaction of their gustatory needs (*himmatuhum al-aklu wa-al-shurb*, Q7: 206). Furthermore, the reason quadrupeds are given the name *bahīma*, he explains, is because of the "obscurity of their minds, as they are deficient in language and comprehension and are unable to discriminate and to understand" (Q6: 24). This interpretation is obviously influenced by the etymology of the word *bahīma*, the root of which, b-h-m, is related to obscurity and darkness, a semantic field that he connects with nonhuman animals' lack of rationality, whereas it could be interpreted as an indication of humans' inability to figure out what goes on in other animals' minds (i.e., these animals' minds are incomprehensible to humans, not in and of themselves).

Additionally, as we have seen, although al-Qurṭubī admits that the precepts of Islamic law do not apply to nonhuman animals, he still affirms that in the hereafter they will be held accountable for injustices that take place among them (Q6: 271). In contrast with this statement, in his commentary on the verse "Do you deem then that We had created you for naught (*khalaqnākum 'abathan*), and that you would not be returned unto Us?" (23/al-Mu'minūn: 115) in which disbelievers (or humans) are addressed, al-Qurṭubī maintains that "pointless creation" or "being created for naught" is the case of beasts (*al-bahā'im*) "which expect no reward and no punishment" (Q12: 104). He derives the same conclusion from 75/al-Qiyāma: 36,⁹³ about which he says, "it means like beasts, [which are created] aimlessly (*muhmalan*) for no benefit" (Q12: 104). This, obviously, is a surprising comment, considering that in a different context al-Qurṭubī understands nonhuman animals' resurrection literally and asserts that they will obtain their due requital on Judgment Day.

Likewise, although on a number of occasions this exegete affirms nonhuman animals' fundamental innocence, he still perceives a resemblance between them and disbelievers, which seems to suggest nonhuman animals' immorality or lowliness. For example, one of the paradoxical

⁹³ "Does man think that he is to be left aimless?"

elements in the creation of camels that he points out is the fact that a sinful creature (i.e., the human being) rides an innocent one (i.e., the camel, Q10: 81). In addition, commenting on Noah's flood in 11/Hūd: 41–4, he affirms that many children and nonhuman animals died, however, that their death was simply because they reached their appointed times (*ājāl*), meaning that in their cases death was not punishment for any misdeeds, as it was with disbelievers, but was a natural process (Q9: 29). This explanation also presumes the basic innocence of nonhuman animals and children. On some occasions, he also cites a ḥadīth asserting that “If it were not for [some] men who fear God (*rijāl khushsha'*), grazing beasts (*bahā'im rutta'*), and suckling infants (*ṣibyān ruḍḍā'*), torment would have been poured on the sinful” (Q2: 80; 3: 170),⁹⁴ thus referring not only to nonhuman animals' basic innocence, but also pointing to the fact that their innocence is one of the reasons the sinners are spared (immediate) punishment. In contrast with this attitude, in his discussion of God's oath “And the begetter and that which he begat (*wa-wālidin wa-mā walad*)” (90/al-Balad: 3), al-Qurṭubī suggests that the word *wālid* (begetter) refers to Adam, whereas the phrase *mā walad* (that which he begat) “refers to his descendants ... or rather, to the righteous among his descendents. As for the wicked among them, they are like beasts (*fa-ka'annahum bahā'im*)” (Q20: 41). Such conflicting views about nonhuman animals are also often encountered in al-Ṭabarī's and ibn Kathīr's interpretations, however, because al-Rāzī's and al-Qurṭubī's discussions of these themes are generally more elaborate, the preceding examples may suffice as an illustration of these attitudes. Nonetheless, these inconsistencies are intriguing, which leads us to ask about the reasons behind them.

Although answers to this question can only be speculative, it is still possible to discern a pattern in our exegetes' treatment of Qur'anic animal themes. Before pointing to this pattern, however, it is perhaps also justified to suggest that some of these contradictions are only at a superficial level. For example, when al-Qurṭubī asserts that *an'ām* do not expect judgment or punishment, his point may be that they do not expect (legal) judgment in this life. Therefore, this does not necessarily mean that in this context he is denying that nonhuman animals will be resurrected and judged in the afterlife. Generally speaking, however, at least in the case of al-Ṭabarī, al-Qurṭubī, and ibn Kathīr, it seems that whenever they deal with Qur'anic animal themes, such as nonhuman animals' language

⁹⁴ Al-Bayhaqī, *al-Sunan al-kubrā, Kitāb ṣalāt al-istisqā'*, no. 6390.

and morality, they endeavor to highlight the worth of, and to attribute much complexity to, other animals. However, when they are not under the direct effect of these themes, they often revert to stereotypical views of other animals. Thus, the linear approach to the Qur'an (discussed in the second chapter) clearly plays a role in this inconsistency. Likewise, analogies between *an'ām* and disbelievers sometimes cause our exegetes to reduce the complexity they ascribe to other animals and, on certain occasions, lead them to attribute a number of negative traits to this animal category. The fact that such views of other animals are not consistent with the ones they hold in other contexts somehow does not lead these three exegetes to attempt to reconcile their own conflicting views. Generally speaking, however, when our exegetes allow their ideas about other animals to be shaped by the Qur'an, their views of such animals become distinctly more complex and positive.

This Qur'anic impact may even be detected in the case of al-Rāzī. As we have seen, even though this exegete appears in his *tafsīr* as consistently convinced of the superiority of humans to other animals and bases this superiority mostly on the element of rationality, which he generally ascribes to the former but not to the latter, in *al-Maṭālib al-'āliya* he was willing to ascribe to nonhuman animals a considerable degree of intelligence and knowledge when describing mental processes that he infers from the behaviors of certain animals. Because al-Rāzī wrote *al-Maṭālib al-'āliya* after his *tafsīr*, this suggests that his views of other animals evolved.⁹⁵ In view of this, it is tempting to suggest as well that this change in views was at least partly the product of his deep engagement with the Qur'anic animal themes in his *tafsīr*. This engagement might have prompted him to observe certain animals more closely and led him to reconsider many of his prior ideas about the nonhuman animals' world.

To return to the point raised earlier in this book about the extent to which the Qur'an has shaped Muslims' perceptions of and attitudes toward nonhuman animals, in view of the preceding discussion, it seems that, at least in the case of al-Ṭabarī, al-Qurṭubī, and ibn Kathīr, their respective readings and interpretations of the Qur'an clearly led them to ascribe to other animals a number of characteristics that are not traditionally thought to apply to nonhuman species, such as a significant level of spirituality, rationality, morality, and accountability. Nonetheless, this effect was not enduring, as indicated in the discussion. These shifting attitudes seem to be caused first by the linear approach to the Qur'an,

⁹⁵ Shihadeh, *The Theological Ethics*, 10.

but even more importantly by the discrepancy between certain Qur'anic animal themes – even as they occasionally read them – and the prevalent cultural views about them as well as the way humans tend to experience other animals. In fact, it seems that these three exegetes failed to engage profoundly with this topic so as to reconcile (even) their own reading of the Qur'anic depiction of nonhuman animals with the way humans experience them to ultimately reach an intellectually consistent view on this topic.

In contrast with these three exegetes, al-Rāzī is not only more consistent in his views about other animals, but also seems to have given this topic considerable thought. In the case of this exegete, however, the Qur'an was not the only source on which he relied to form his ideas about other animals. In addition to the Qur'an and various cultural influences, this exegete's ideas about other animals were deeply molded by Neoplatonic presuppositions, which seem to have conditioned his understanding of many Qur'anic animal themes. Al-Rāzī's views of other animals were not static, however, as evidenced by the views he expressed in his later work, *al-Maṭālib al-'āliya*. In view of this, it may be justified to suggest that even in the case of this exegete, the Qur'an played an important role in shaping his views of other species.

Humans in the Qur'an

In the previous chapters, I have argued that many of the themes that could be interpreted as indicative of humans' superiority to other animals, such as those of *taskhīr* (subjugation/adaptation), *maskh* (metamorphosis), and *istikhlāf* (succession rather than vicegerency), are not necessarily signs of the underprivileged or lower status of the latter. Furthermore, the complexity that the Qur'an ascribes to nonhuman animals indicates that they have an ample share in many of the features traditionally thought to be the monopoly of humans or the so-called rational creatures. This complexity often serves to justify elevating the status of humans over that of many other animals. Thus, it is questionable whether or not features such as rationality, morality, or accountability elevate the status of humans above that of other animals, or if they do (because humans may still be thought to have a greater share of these attributes), whether or not the status emanating from such features is as significant as is usually believed. Because the status of nonhuman animals is generally considered in comparison with humans, two additional points need to be addressed. First, we must determine what the Qur'an says about humans; and second, we must understand the criteria on which the Qur'an assigns status.

In his discussion of the theme of man in the Qur'an, Fazlur Rahman points out that man is "God's creature just like any other created being"; nonetheless, he adds that "man is distinguished from the rest of natural creation by the fact that after fashioning him, God 'breathed My own spirit' into him."¹ It is hardly possible to contest the fact that humans in

¹ Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur'an* (Minneapolis: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1994), 17.

the Qur'an are presented as belonging with the rest of creation, yet also as having some unique characteristics. As Waldau points out, however, the word *unique* "can be used as an adjective to convey the idea that members of one species have a trait that no other animals have," a sense to which he refers as "unique-different"; and another sense in which this word means "that the members of one species are more valuable than are members of another species," which he refers to as "unique-better."² Therefore, in addition to identifying the ways in which the Qur'an considers humans to be unique, it is also important to know what type of uniqueness is intended.

HUMANS' STATUS

In addition to the spirit of God breathed into Adam's body, humans' distinction in the Qur'an is usually inferred from a number of other themes. The Qur'an tells us that God "taught Adam all the names" (2/al-Baqara: 31), something seemingly denied even to angels. In addition, angels were ordered to fall in prostration to Adam upon his creation; this is often taken as a sign of the distinction of the entire human race and not only of the first man. Humans also appear as the only species that has accepted the burden of the trust (*amāna*). Many exegetes hold the view that humans will continue to live eternally in the hereafter, whereas other earthly animals will be turned into dust after obtaining their due requital. More importantly, according to Pickthall's translation, the Qur'an tells us,

Verily, We have honoured (*karramnā*) the children of Adam. We carry them on the land and the sea, and have made provision of good things for them, and have preferred them above many of those whom We created with a marked preferment (*wa-faḍḍalnāhum 'alā kathīrin mimman khalaqnā tafḍīlan*). (17/al-Isrā': 70)

Therefore, humans appear to be distinct from other species, including angels, in a number of ways. There is no need, however, to focus here on the theme of prostration because it involves only (or mainly) humans and angels;³ nor on the theme of names because, unlike its Biblical equivalent, it has no impact on the status of nonhuman animals. The Qur'anic Adam, unlike the Biblical one, was taught all names (*al-asmā' kullahā*) (2/al-Baqara: 31), not only the names of animals. This, in the opinions

² Waldau, *The Specter of Speciesism*, 97.

³ Satan (Iblis), who was also ordered to prostrate himself to Adam, is viewed by some Muslim scholars as an angel, but more generally it is believed that he belonged to the jinn species.

of Qur'anic exegetes, consists of an exhaustive list of all created things. Thus, if, indeed, "to have possession of a thing's name is to have power over it,"⁴ as John Passmore maintains, then the Qur'anic Adam would have had power over all created things, and his role would almost replicate that of God. This conclusion, obviously, is not deduced from the Qur'anic theme of names, as, regardless of the centrality of humans' position, in the view of these exegetes Adam and his progeny are part of creation and not likened to the Creator. In Qur'anic exegesis, discussions of the names generally raise the question of language and related attributes of knowledge and rationality. Adam's capability of naming things "demonstrated that [he] possessed the capacity for creative knowledge that angels lacked", Rahman observes.⁵ Therefore, the assumption that, by teaching Adam the names, God delegated part of His divine authority to humankind – a Judeo-Christian tradition – is not replicated in Islamic doctrine. In view of this, the focus here is on the two themes of *tafḍīl* (usually understood as preferment) and *amāna* (trust), both of which are thought to impart to humans a special status specifically vis-à-vis other earthly animals.

Tafḍīl

While "honour[ing] the children of Adam," "carry[ing] them in the land and in the sea," and "ma[king] provisions of good things" are some of the favors that God conferred on human beings, the last sentence of 17/ al-Isrā': 70, because of the comparison in it, has understandably been taken to point to humans' superiority – and not mere distinction – to many creatures, particularly other earthly animals. Although the Qur'an itself does not specify the ways in which humans are favored, our exegetes provide us with a long list of the aspects that, in their opinions, account for humans' special status. Among those, they cite the subjugation and serviceability of all creation to them; traveling land and sea, which only humans can do intentionally; dealing with finances; eating with one's hands;⁶ being granted a wide array of foods, drinks, and clothing; having erect posture; and being physically beautiful. In addition, humans

⁴ Passmore, *Man's Responsibility for Nature*, 8.

⁵ Rahman, *Major Themes*, 18.

⁶ Although some Qur'anic exegetes must have known that a number of other species eat using their hands, in comparisons of this kind they seem to hold an essentialized idea of nonhuman animals.

have been given senses, such as sight and hearing, which allow them to acquire understanding and discriminate between benefits and harms in worldly and religious matters; language; the ability to write; and cumulative knowledge. The fact that the Prophet Muḥammad is a member of the human race also accounts for the distinction and superiority of the entire human species in the view of a number of exegetes (Ṭ8: 115; R21: 10–4; Q10: 190–2; IK9: 44–5).

Al-Qurṭubī, like other exegetes, considers that the comparison in 17/ al-Isrā': 70 applies to humans and nonhuman animals. He cites many of the points mentioned, however, he argues that none of them weigh much in this comparison. He explains that in the same way that God bestowed these gifts on humans He also bestowed on other animal species other gifts in which they have a greater share than humans. For example, He gave horses a faster pace, better eyesight, and stronger hearing; made elephants stronger; lions braver; and roosters more generous than human beings. Therefore, in al-Qurṭubī's opinion the human privileges that are commonly cited are of the unique-different type of distinction and are counterbalanced by other privileges in which certain other species have greater shares than humans. It is also worth noting that most of these privileges are brought up in Ikhwān al-Ṣafā's court case to prove humans' superiority, only to be refuted by the nonhuman animal characters in this treatise, who highlight the subjective nature of humans' judgment.

Al-Qurṭubī, however, adds that reason, which “is the pillar (*umda*) of religious accountability (*taklif*) is the element that accounts for humans' real distinction. It is thanks to reason that one can know God, understand His speech, know His blessings, and believe in His prophets” (Q10: 190–1).

Al-Qurṭubī, therefore, still seems to understand this verse as pointing to humans' superior status or their unique-better distinction, which he bases on their possession of rational faculties. From his perspective, however, reason is valuable not as an end in itself, but as a means that can lead humans to know God. Therefore, the ultimate criterion in this comparison is knowledge of God and not intelligence for its own sake. In fact, in this respect al-Qurṭubī differs from al-Rāzī, who often presents the mere possession of rational faculties as a sign of human superiority.

Al-Qurṭubī also notes that,

Since it [reason] did not fulfil all the tasks that were expected of it, prophets were sent and scriptures revealed. Therefore, religion is the equivalent of the sun, while reason is the equivalent of the eye. If the eye is opened and if it is sound, it

becomes possible for it to see the sun and to become conscious of the details of things. (Q10: 190–1)

It is not necessary to reiterate al-Qurṭubī's inconsistencies in his presentation of nonhuman animals' spirituality and rational faculties, however, it is important to highlight that even in this context he makes the value of reason fully contingent on its ability to fulfill the function of seeing the "light of religion" and believing in and obeying God. However, because most humans, as al-Qurṭubī acknowledges in a different context (Q7: 47), have failed to use reason properly, how can reason still elevate their status above that of other animals? Because the value of reason is purely instrumental and depends on its proper use, which corresponds to knowing about, having faith in, and obeying God, then this gift can only elevate the status of those who use reason properly. However, the verse speaks about the *tafḍīl* of all of Adam's children, not only the believers or the righteous among them, thus pointing to another inconsistency in this exegete's treatment of humans' status.

This ambivalence, in my view, is at least partly a result of the complexity and ambiguity of the concept of *tafḍīl*. This concept, in fact, seems to have caused a number of difficulties for many Qur'anic scholars and continues to do so up to the present. Although the verb *faḍḍala* is understood by some exegetes in the same way that Pickthall renders it in his translation of the Qur'an, that is, to prefer, some indications suggest that the ideas of preference, being someone's favorite, and making or considering someone better than or superior to another are not intended by this Qur'anic concept. Nonetheless, the interpretation of *tafḍīl* as a sign of superiority can be detected in a number of early treatments of this concept and has become even more prominent over time, as illustrated by the later lexical definitions given to it. Therefore, after discussing the lexical treatment of this concept, I will study it in specific Qur'anic contexts and exegetical discussions to present a clearer understanding of it.

Tafḍīl and faḍl in Arabic lexicons

Al-Khalil ibn Aḥmad (d. 170/786), the author of the earliest Arabic lexicon, *Kitāb al-ʿayn*, considers the concept of *faḍl* to be well-known (*al-faḍl ma'rūf*). This assumption, which is certainly more valid at the time of the composition of this dictionary than in subsequent centuries, results in some ambiguity because of the circularity of some of his definitions, as he often uses derivatives of the same root to explain the meaning of words derived from this root. Nonetheless, his general treatment of this concept

shows that the basic semantic field of the f-ḍ-l root is “extra part.” For example, *faḍla* means leftover food (*al-baqiyya min al-ṭa‘ām*). The adjective *fuḍul* describes someone who contrasts the layers of her/his garments for purposes of adornment. A *fiḍāl* is a spare garment that someone keeps for use at home. The verb *aḍal*, when used with food or land, means to leave some of it. In all these cases, therefore, the basic meaning of *faḍl* and its derivatives is extra or additional; for the most part, it relates to quantity. In addition, al-Khalil explains that the word *faḍīla* means “increase and superiority in *faḍl* (*al-daraja wa-al-rif'a fī al-faḍl*).” Because of the circularity of this definition, the meaning seems rather ambiguous. Considering that the root f-ḍ-l is sometimes used in contexts of desired increase (leftover food indicates abundance and layering garments creates an aesthetic effect), however, the word *faḍīla*, understood in later dictionaries as virtue, may simply mean here “praiseworthy increase.”⁷

Al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī (d. 502/1108) defines the concept of *faḍl* as *al-ziyāda ‘an al-iqtīṣād*, which means superfluity or overflow. Although his discussion of the verse 17/al-Isrā’: 70 indicates that the verbs *faḍula* and *faḍḍala* may carry the idea of excelling, al-Iṣfahānī still emphasizes this concept’s quantitative rather than qualitative nature. In other words, *faḍula* for him often means having more things rather than necessarily having better things or being better. Al-Iṣfahānī, in fact, specifies that there are two types of *faḍl*, a good type, as in increase in knowledge or in clemency (*ḥilm*), and a bad type, as in anger or excessive anger. He adds that the word *faḍl* is used mostly to indicate praiseworthy increase, whereas another derivative of the root f-ḍ-l, the word *fuḍūl*, is used to indicate blameworthy increase. Al-Iṣfahānī also explains that “a gift that is not required of the giver (i.e., given out of pure generosity and not in return for, or in expectation of, anything else) is called *faḍl*.”⁸ According to this definition, then, the word *faḍl* itself means more good things, however, because this root can have derivatives that indicate excess in both directions (*faḍl* versus *fuḍūl*), it is safe to deduce that the quantitative aspect is the more fundamental component of this concept.

The lexicographer ibn Manẓūr (630–711/1232–1311), who lived about two centuries after al-Iṣfahānī but only about one generation after al-Rāzī and who was a contemporary of al-Qurṭubī, defines the concept of *faḍl* as the opposite of *naqṣ* (decrease) and *naqīṣa* (shortcoming, fault), therefore adding a clear qualitative nuance (found in the concept of fault)

⁷ Al-Khalil ibn Aḥmad, *Kitāb al-‘ayn* (Bagdad: Dār al-Rashid, 1980–5), s.v. “f-ḍ-l.”

⁸ Al-Iṣfahānī, *Mufradāt al-fāz al-Qur’an al-karīm*, s.v. “f-ḍ-l.”

to the quantitative one (found in decrease). Ibn Manẓūr still gives a number of examples in which words derived from the root f-ḍ-l convey only a quantitative idea and cites many of the examples found in *Kitāb al-ʿayn* to illustrate his point. He also cites a *ḥadīth* stating that “the *faḍl* of a garment [will lead its owner to] hellfire,” which, he explains, means “the part of the garment that a person trails on the ground in order to show off will result in that person’s punishment in the hereafter.”⁹ In this case, *faḍl* refers to the extra part of one’s garment that is not needed to cover the body. In these usages, then, it is clear that the word *faḍl* has only a quantitative aspect: It refers to the extra or superfluous part of a thing. Although in some instances it indicates praiseworthy or desired increase, this idea is perhaps only because sometimes the extra thing happens to be cherished.

Whereas ibn Manẓūr makes the distinction between the two nuances of the concept using words from the same root (*faḍl* is the opposite of *naqṣ* and *naqīṣa*), the later lexicographer al-Zabīdī (d. 1205/1791) draws a distinction between the two nuances using words from different roots: He talks about *faḍl* with the meaning of *ziyāda* (increase) versus *faḍl* with the meaning of *sharaf* (honour), hence showing that the qualitative aspect had become, by his time, firmly entrenched in this word.¹⁰ Thus, *faḍl* came to be not only about having more, or having more good things, but also about *being* better. Therefore, although in earlier dictionaries *faḍl* and its derivatives mostly indicated the idea of superfluous and surplus in different contexts, and occasionally a surplus of good things (hence becoming a desired surplus), a qualitative dimension attached to the receiver or owner of *faḍl* gradually crept in. From having more things or more good things, *faḍula* gradually came to mean being better.

Faḍl and tafḍīl in the Qur'an

Faḍl. The two most frequent derivatives of the root “f-ḍ-l” occurring in the Qur'an are the noun *faḍl* and the verb *faḍḍala* with its verbal noun, *tafḍīl*. The first (*faḍl*) has a more straightforward meaning; in most cases, the Qur'an speaks about God's *faḍl* to humankind in general, or to smaller groups or individuals, such as the believers or the Prophet. For example, in 2/al-Baqara: 243, the Qur'an informs us, “God is a Lord of Kindness (*dhū faḍl*) to humankind, but most of humankind gives not

⁹ Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʿArab* (Beirut: Dār ṣādir, 1993), s.v. “f-ḍ-l.”

¹⁰ Al-Murtaḍā al-Zabīdī, *Tāj al-ʿarūs min jawhar al-qāmūs* (Kuwait: Maṭbaʿat Ḥukūmat al-Kuwayt, 1965), s.v. “f-ḍ-l.”

thanks.” In al-Ṭabarī’s interpretation, God’s *faḍl* to humankind consists of “the fact that He showed them the path of guidance, admonished them against the paths of ruin and destruction, in addition to all other worldly, religious, personal, and financial graces that He bestowed on them” (Ṭ2: 605). Addressing the Children of Israel, the Qur’an also says, “If it had not been for the grace (*faḍl*) of God and His mercy you would have been among the losers” (2/al-Baqara: 64). This, in al-Rāzī’s interpretation, is a reference to the respite God granted them until they repented (R3: 101). Likewise, addressing the Prophet’s Companions, the Qur’an says, “Had it not been for the grace (*faḍl*) of God and His mercy unto you, not one of you would ever have grown pure. But God causes whom He will to grow” (24/al-Nūr: 21). Thus, in these verses, *faḍl* means grace and kindness of God. Considering al-İşfahānī’s definition of this concept (*ziyāda*: superfluity, overflow; a gift that is not required of the giver), it is reasonable to suggest that *faḍl* corresponds to God’s grace and kindness extended to humans not in return for anything they do, but as something extra, that is, purely out of His generosity. The idea of superfluity or supplementary benefits is particularly clear in the verse that states “Then, as for those who believed and did good works, He will give them in full their rewards and grant them extra from His bounty (*faḍl*)” (4/al-Nisā’: 173).¹¹

God’s *faḍl* is also something humans are encouraged to seek. For example, after performing the Friday congregational prayer, believers are told to “disperse in the land and seek of God’s bounty (*faḍl*)” (62/al-Jumu’a: 10). Likewise, one of the reasons God “constrained (*sakḥkhara*) the sea to be of service” is that “you [humankind] may seek of His bounty (*faḍl*) and that haply you may give thanks” (16/al-Naḥl: 14). In all these cases the word *faḍl* has a quantitative component, consisting of the fact that it is something extra, and a qualitative attribute, as it always refers to good things that God gives to humans. Significantly, this qualitative dimension characterizes the bounties themselves and is not indicative, by itself, of the merit of their recipients. In fact, as in the case of *taskhīr*, the Qur’an often highlights humans’ failure to show the proper response to God’s *faḍl*, as in most cases they remain ungrateful. In addition to the frequent mention of most humans’ lack of appreciation for God’s bounties, the Qur’an also denounces a category of people who assert that if God “gives us of His bounty (*faḍl*) we will give alms and become of the righteous. Yet when He gave them of His bounty, they hoarded it and turned away,

¹¹ Sahih International translation.

averse" (9/al-Tawba: 75–6). Because the Qur'an readily points out and denounces such failures to show appreciation, it becomes clear that one of the goals of highlighting God's *faḍl* to humans is to emphasize God's generosity and kindness rather than the distinction or special status of humans. The fact that God's *faḍl* is not meant as a sign of preference is even clearer in the verse stating, "And let not those who hoard up that which God has bestowed upon them of His bounty (*faḍl*) think that it is better for them. Nay, it is worse for them" (3/Āl 'Imrān: 180). Indeed, one can obtain God's *faḍl* yet remain blameworthy and subject to divine denunciation. Clearly, then, *faḍl* itself is a sign of God's generosity; how humans respond to it, however, (gratitude or ingratitude) is the element that is indicative of their merit.

One of the purposes of extending *faḍl* to humans appears to be to test them. In his comment on God's numerous bounties, including the subjugation of jinn and other animals to him, the Prophet Solomon acknowledges, "This is of the bounty (*faḍl*) of my Lord, that He may try me whether I give thanks or am ungrateful" (27/al-Naml: 40). Even in the case of a prophet, the purpose of extending God's *faḍl* is not to emphasize his distinction or to indicate that he is God's favorite, but rather to test his character.

It is also important to note that although in some contexts the word *faḍl* is not modified, in others it is modified by adjectives such as *'aẓīm* (great) and *kabīr* (huge), or accompanied by nouns such as *nī'ma* (blessing) and *rah̄ma* (mercy). In this case, *faḍl* always refers to religious gifts in this life or reward in the afterlife. For example, the Prophet is told to "announce unto the believers the good tidings that they will have great bounty (*faḍlan kabīran*) from God" (33/al-Aḥzāb: 47). The Prophet himself is told, "God reveals unto you the scripture and wisdom, and teaches you that which you knew not. The grace (*faḍl*) of God toward you has been infinite" (4/al-Nisā': 113). God's *faḍl* always consists of cherished bounties, however, the gifts that are religious in nature or gifts that are given in the afterlife are more valuable than those bounties that are limited to this life, which are transient in nature.

In sum, we can conclude that in its Qur'anic usages, God's *faḍl* refers to the bounties He extends to humans purely out of His generosity and not in return for deeds they perform or because of personal merit they possess. God does this out of His infinite generosity. Therefore, *faḍl* is indicative of God's goodness, and not the special status of humans. God's *faḍl* is also extended to humans to test them. It may be added that the fact that the Qur'an refers to God's *faḍl* to humans in particular does not

negate the possibility that other creatures may also have an ample share of His bounties (as suggested by al-Qurṭubi). The fact that the Qur'an does not elaborate on God's bounties to other creatures can again be explained by the fact that this scripture is addressed to humans, not to other creatures.

Faḍḍala/tafḍīl. The verb *faḍḍala* is a second form of the same root and naturally has the basic semantic field of *faḍl*; nonetheless, it has an additional comparative element that presents us with a difficult situation. When the Qur'an says that God *faḍḍala* A to B, we know that this comparison involves both a quantitative element (giving more), which is the basic characteristic of this concept and a qualitative aspect that characterizes the gift and not the recipient, considering that God's *faḍl* in the Qur'an deals with His bounties and treasured gifts. These two dimensions lead us to conclude that the meaning of *faḍḍala* A to B could simply be that one gives more good things to A than to B. In this way, *faḍḍala* could mean to favor in the sense of giving more good things and not in the sense of liking more or preferring someone to someone else. However, the former is easily interpreted as a sign of the latter: When someone gives more good things to A than to B, this is usually taken as a sign of preferring A to B. It is important to consider whether this is the case with the Qur'an.

In addition to the *tafḍīl* of the children of Adam "above many of those whom We created," the Qur'an also speaks of the *tafḍīl* of the Children of Israel over "[all] creatures" (*al-ʿālamīn*: 2/al-Baqara: 47, 122; 7/al-A'rāf: 140; and 45/al-Jāthiya: 16); the *tafḍīl* of some messengers and prophets over others or over all creatures (2/al-Baqara: 253; 6/al-An'ām: 86; 17/al-Isrā': 55; and 27/al-Naml: 15); the *tafḍīl* of men and women over one another (4/al-Nisā': 32); the *tafḍīl* of the believers who "strive in the way of God with their wealth and lives" over the believers "who sit still, other than the disabled" (4/al-Nisā': 95); the *tafḍīl* of some fruits over others despite the fact that all of them are "watered with one water" (13/al-Ra'd: 4); the *tafḍīl* of some human beings over others in provision (*rizq*; 16/al-Nahl: 71); and finally the *tafḍīl* of human beings in general over one another (17/al-Isrā': 21). The analysis of some of these usages of *tafḍīl* will hopefully suffice to give us a clearer idea about the meaning of this word.

Although in general the Qur'anic verb *faḍḍala*, including those in some of the earlier sources, is understood to mean to prefer, to consider better, or to cause to become better (hence attaching a qualitative value

to the receiver of God's bounties rather than to the gifts), at least in one instance, which is God's favoring of some people above others in provision (16/al-Naḥl: 71), this understanding is not reflected in some of the exegetical discussions of this concept. Commenting on this verse, al-Rāzī says,

Sometimes we see the smartest and the most brilliant of people endeavouring to make a modest living to no avail, while the gates of good fortune can be wide open for an ignorant and dull person. If there were a correlation between such blessings and the efforts and abilities of the person, then the smarter person would [consistently] have a greater share in such fortunes, but evidently this is not the case. (R20: 63–4)

Al-Rāzī pursues this discussion by pointing out that “disparities between human beings are found in many other areas, such as intelligence and stupidity, beauty and ugliness, wisdom and foolishness, and good health and illness.” This exegete even shares a personal anecdote in which he relates,

In one of my travels I accompanied a king whose wealth and eminence were abundant, but who was unable to ride any of the animals that were brought to him, nor was he able to enjoy any of the variety of savoury foods and fruits that were at his disposal. In contrast, one of us can be sound in humour (*ṣaḥīḥ al-mizāj*) and strong in constitution, however he can hardly find something to fill his stomach. Therefore, even if kings are wealthier than poor people (*yafḍulu al-faqīra fī al-māl*), poor people may have a greater share in health and strength. (R20: 63–4)

This discussion indicates that, in al-Rāzī's view, God's *faḍl* (different types of) provision is neither distributed according to personal merit, nor does it impart absolute superiority on its recipients, nor does it make them better than others. All it does is impart a relative superiority in a given area, and this can be counterbalanced by another's superiority in a different one.

In this area, *tafḍīl* is neither taken as a sign of absolute superiority nor of divine partiality, however, in other contexts it is, and this creates certain difficulties for our exegetes as well as other Qur'anic scholars. This is particularly clear in the discussions of God's *tafḍīl* of the Children of Israel over all creatures (*al-ʿālamīn*); a point that is mentioned four times in the Qur'an. This *tafḍīl* presents our exegetes with difficulties not only because it seemingly compromises the status of the Muslim community, but also because the Qur'an roundly criticizes the Israelites in a number of contexts, including the very ones in which their *tafḍīl* is affirmed. A number of exegetes address this difficulty by narrowing the meaning of

certain words. Al-Ṭabarī interprets “I preferred you (*faḍḍaltukum*) to [all] creatures’ as ‘I preferred (*faḍḍaltu*) your ancestors to *al-‘ālamīn*.’ This is because blessings conferred on forefathers can be considered blessings on their progeny as well” (Ṭ1: 303). About *al-‘ālamīn*, al-Ṭabarī says, “even though this word implies generality (*‘umūm*), it really designates specificity (*khusūṣ*), because the meaning of this verse is that I ‘preferred’ you over the creatures of the time in which you [meaning your ancestors] lived” (Ṭ1: 303). Al-Ṭabarī corroborates his argument by a *ḥadīth* in which the Prophet is reported to have said, “You [Muslims] came after seventy communities (*umma*), and you are the best (*khayr*) of them all, and the noblest (*akram*) in the sight of God” (Ṭ1: 303). Al-Ṭabarī clearly understands the concept of *tafḍīl* as a status-related term that points to the personal merit or superiority of the party that is favored, however, this view also compels him to restrict the distinction of the Children of Israel to highlight that of Muslims.

Al-Qurṭubī, however, agreeing with al-Ṭabarī, adds that another possible interpretation is that God *faḍḍala* the Children of Israel over all creatures because of the [large] number of messengers whom He sent to them, and this was specific to them to the exclusion of all others” presumably at all times (Q1: 256). The early exegete Muqātil (d. 150/767) also understands the *tafḍīl* of the Israelites as the *tafḍīl* of their ancestors (which, apparently, he understands as preferment), however, he specifies that their *tafḍīl* consists of singling them out with “manna, quail, [water gushing out of] a stone, and the white cloud [overshadowing them].”¹² Therefore, even if this *tafḍīl* in Muqātil’s understanding can be a sign of preferment, it still consists of the favors and blessings God bestowed on them to the exclusion of all other communities. Receiving these blessings, however, does not appear to be linked to any inherent merit on the part of the Children of Israel, and considering the criticism that often accompanies the *tafḍīl* verses, it is justifiable to conclude that the extension of these blessings did not result in a higher status, nor did it make them better than other nations.

The ambivalence in the meaning of this concept seems to be caused by a misconstruction of God’s favors: These are often interpreted as a sign that God considers one party to be better than another, either because that party deserves the divine gifts because it is intrinsically better than the others (perhaps because God created it of a better substance

¹² Muqātil ibn Sulaymān, *Tafsīr Muqātil* (Cairo: Mu’assasat al-Ḥalabī wa-Shurakā’uh, 1969), 1: 133.

or nature); causes a given party to become better; or simply as a sign of being liked more for no particular reason, that is, as a result of some sort of favoritism. This interpretation is not, however, supported by textual evidence from the Qur'an. Recipients of God's *faḍl* do not deserve the *faḍl* type of graces because the very definition of *faḍl* means superfluity and gifts given not in return for anything, including merit or deeds (by al-Iṣfahānī's definition). Furthermore, receiving God's *faḍl* in itself does not make someone God's favorite nor does it impart on the recipient absolute or even meaningful superiority. The favor may cause the recipient to be superior to another in a specific area, such as wealth, however, what leads to preferment or becoming God's favorite is, among other things, one's response to God's *faḍl*. If the recipients of God's graces fail to respond properly, the ultimate result of such *faḍl* is God's displeasure. In fact, *faḍl* can be used as a test and may ultimately demonstrate that someone is inherently undeserving, as suggested by Solomon.

With regard to the Muslim community in particular, or possibly to the limited circle of the Prophet and his Companions, the Qur'an does establish their distinction in a clear unique-better sense. The word used to express this idea, however, is not derived from the f-d-l root, but rather from kh-y-r, which implies goodness. The Qur'an says, "You are the best (*khayr*) community that has been raised up for humankind" (3/ Āl 'Imrān: 110). Furthermore, this verse links this qualitative dimension or the inherent merit of the Muslim community not to favors imparted to it from God or to random choice, but rather to certain traits it possesses and deeds it performs, because the same verse continues by explaining, "You enjoin right conduct and forbid indecency; and you believe in God" (3/ Āl 'Imrān: 110). It clearly establishes a link between deeds and faith on the one hand, and merit on the other. Therefore, being favored (*mufaḍḍal*) means receiving more of certain good things, whereas being *khayr* means to be or to become qualitatively better. In contrast to *tafḍīl*, one needs to earn the quality of *khayr* (goodness) through faith and good deeds.

The concept of *tafḍīl* continues to challenge Qur'anic scholars up to the present, particularly when evaluating its influence on the status of women and examining the subject of the Children of Israel. According to Pickthall's translation, the Qur'an states, "Men are in charge of women, because God has made the one of them to excel the other (*bi-mā faḍḍala Allāhu ba'ḍahum 'alā ba'din*)" (4/al-Nisā': 34). Similarly, A. J. Arberry renders the idea of *tafḍīl* in this verse as "God has preferred in bounty one of them over another," whereas N. J. Dawood translates the same section saying "Because God has made the one superior to the other."

In the same way, Amina Wadud, who rightly observes that *tafḍīl* cannot be earned, but rather “can only be given by God,” and that it is given “to test the one to whom it is given,” still takes this concept to mean preference.¹³

In contrast, Muhammad Abdel Haleem, who disagrees with the preceding translations, explains that the “root of the concept of *faḍl* in Arabic means ‘to give more’” and that “Lexically *faḍl* is *ziyāda*, i.e., more.”¹⁴ Abdel Haleem goes on to specify that “the Qur’an does not say, ‘Because God has given *men* more than *women* ...’ but ‘God has given *some* more than *others*.’ This implies that to women God gave certain things, while to men He gave other things.”¹⁵ These different gifts, according to Abdel Haleem’s discussion, do not elevate the status of one gender above that of the other. He states also that “This expression [i.e., *faḍl/faḍḍala*] occurs a number of times to refer to the nature of things, namely that in this world some have been given more wealth (16: 71) and some more of other things.”¹⁶ Therefore, *faḍl* can only impart a limited type of superiority in a certain area, which could be wealth, or (as indicated by al-Rāzī’s discussion) health, strength, or other things. Like Wadud, Abdel Haleem highlights the reason God bestows certain types of *faḍl* on certain human beings – to test them – as he observes that “Each will be judged according to how they conducted themselves with what they have been given (6: 165).”¹⁷

The same ambivalence about the concept of *tafḍīl* can be noted in John Kaltner’s treatment of the status of the Children of Israel in the Qur’an. Kaltner writes, “In verse al-Baqara: 122 God addresses the children of Israel and tells them to remember ‘that I set you above all creatures.’ This sounds very much like the biblical theme of the election of Israel as God’s chosen people, and this text suggests that the Qur’an does allow for the possibility of such special status.”

However, Kaltner seems to think that this interpretation is inconsistent with the Qur’an’s general message, which does not allow for favoritism.¹⁸

¹³ Amina Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 69.

¹⁴ Muhammad Abdel Haleem, *Understanding the Qur'an: Themes and Style* (London: Tauris, 1999) 49.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 50.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ See for example his statement, “In the Muslim view, God does not play favorites but desires all people to embrace Islam and thereby establish an intimate and special bond with the deity.” John Kaltner, *Ishmael Instructs Isaac: An Introduction to the Qur'an for Bible Readers* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1999), 94.

He adds, "when we interpret it [2/al-Baqara: 122] in light of God's words to Abraham that the covenant does not apply to evildoers we see that it does not impart a permanent or immutable special status."¹⁹ Therefore, although Kaltner understands the concept of *tafḍīl* as "setting above," he has to resort to Qur'anic context to circumscribe the meaning of the *tafḍīl* of the Children of Israel by making it contingent on their deeds (evildoers are not included in the covenant with God). In his discussion of 7/al-A'rāf: 134–40, dealing with the Children of Israel, Kaltner also notes that "this passage contains curiously ambiguous evaluations of the Israelites, as they are on the one hand 'exalted above all others' (v. 140) yet on the other Moses describes them as 'an ignorant people.'" This perceived ambiguity, in my opinion, is a result of a misinterpretation of the concept of *tafḍīl*.

Similarly, in her attempt to play down the significance of the concept of *tafḍīl* on the status of women, Wadud brings up the *tafḍīl* between prophets, referred to in 2/al-Baqara: 253,²⁰ which, again, she understands as preference. Because the Qur'an states also that "We [Muslims, believers] make no distinction between any of His messengers" (2/al-Baqara: 285), Wadud concludes that according to the Qur'an "no distinction is made between them [prophets]" and consequently that this "preference is relative" thus implying that even if *tafḍīl* means preference, this preference is not very significant. The concept of *tafriq* (distinction / separation), on which Wadud builds her argument, however, is not related to that of *tafḍīl*. According to al-Ṭabarī, 2/al-Baqara: 285 implies that the believers "accept the message of all prophets, and do not accept some while rejecting others" (T3: 153). Therefore, this verse does not tell us anything about the status of any prophet, but rather informs us of the believers' reaction to their messages, all of which are to be accepted. The *tafḍīl* between prophets, on the other hand, although sometimes understood as indicative of the superiority of some to others, still refers to the special gifts bestowed on them. According to Muqātil, this consists of the fact that God spoke to Moses, took Abraham as His friend, gave to David the Psalms and allowed hills and birds to praise God with him, taught Solomon the language of birds and subjugated the wind and the jinn to him, and allowed Jesus to heal the blind and the leper and to create birds from clay. All of these gifts are certainly valuable and cherished, and in

¹⁹ John Kaltner, *Ishmael Instructs Isaac*, 119.

²⁰ Rendered by Pickthall as "Of those messengers, some of whom We have caused to excel others."

the Qur'an all prophets are highly regarded; however, considering the general usage of the word *faḍl* in the Qur'an, there is no necessary correlation between God's gifts and these prophets' personal merit. However, one can safely say that there is a correlation between the gifts and God's generosity. Wadud had to resort to the *tafriq* argument to resolve the same difficulty encountered by al-Ṭabarī and Kaltner. In all these cases, *tafḍīl* is interpreted as a sign of preferment or raising a given party above another, and this conflicts with other Qur'anic themes, thus creating a need to circumvent or to play down the preferment interpretation.

To return to 17/al-Isrā': 70, the *tafḍīl* of human beings "above many of those whom We created" may indeed involve a comparison between human and nonhuman animals, although this possibility cannot be firmly established. Whatever is being compared, the point of this verse, in my view, is to highlight God's grace to humans and not to elevate their status above that of other creatures. This verse tells us that God has bestowed on humans a number of gifts that He has not bestowed on other creatures. The verse, in fact, seems to emphasize material gifts in particular ("We carry them on the land and the sea, and have made provision of good things for them"). Such gifts are signs of God's generosity, however, the Qur'an often presents them as having limited and short-term value (limited to this life). In addition, as with other cases of *tafḍīl* in the Qur'an, humans are not given these gifts because they deserve them or on the basis of an inherent or pre-existing superiority or distinction, nor once they were given these gifts did they become better than or totally superior to other creatures. The two subsequent verses, in fact, remind us that still: "On the day when We shall summon all men with their record, whoso is given his book in his right hand – such will read their book and they will not be wronged a shred. Whoso is blind here will be blind in the Hereafter, and yet further from the road" (17/al-Isrā': 71–2).

Therefore, despite their *takrīm* and *tafḍīl*, many humans remain blind in this life and will remain so in the afterlife. If, in fact, being *mufaḍḍal* is an indication of one's status as a favorite of God, why would God allow His favorite creatures to remain blind, and why does He denounce their behavior?

In view of both lexical and contextual factors, it is plausible to conclude that conferring grace on humans is not a sign that God prefers them to other creatures. He extends these bounties because of His own goodness, and, in some instances, to test humans. To return to Waldau's distinction, although *tafḍīl* indicates that humans are unique (because they are given gifts that are not given to other creatures), they are only

unique-different and not unique-better, for even if this uniqueness imparts a type of superiority on them in certain areas, this superiority can be counterbalanced by other types of superiority resulting from the *tafḍīl* of other species in other areas.

As we have seen, our exegetes have a long list of the special gifts that God conferred on humans, however, the Qur'an itself does not elaborate on the ways humans are unique. Interestingly, something that seems to be given to humans only is *amāna*. None of our exegetes perceive a correlation between the two concepts of *amāna* and *tafḍīl*, probably because the Qur'an presents *amāna* as a responsibility and a laborious task rather than as a grace (*faḍl*) from God. Even though *amāna* is not a grace and is not listed among the factors that account for the *tafḍīl* (favoring with special gifts) of humans, however, it still is something that seems to have been given to humans only and thus can account for their uniqueness.

Amāna

The Qur'an says, "We offered the trust (*amāna*) unto the heavens and the earth and the hills, but they shrank from bearing it and were afraid of it. And the human being (*al-insān*) assumed it. He has proved a *zalūm* and a *jahūl*" (33/al-Aḥzāb: 72). In the most prevalent opinion, the concept of *amāna* consists of the general imposition of religious obligations (*taklīf*) in return for reward or punishment, and *insān* in this verse corresponds to Adam, or more generally to the human race (Q14: 163–5; R25: 202). It is understood that God offered this religious responsibility to the heavens, the earth, and the hills, however, all of them declined it, preferring to be subdued (*musakhkharāt*) to God's command, stating that they wanted neither reward nor punishment. When God offered it to Adam, explaining that he would be required to satisfy its obligations (*tu'addi ḥaqqahā*), however, Adam, overconfidently, did not hesitate to assume it. In another account, it is suggested that Adam volunteered to assume this trust without even being asked to do so. After he assumed it, our exegetes say that God provided him with help, consisting of "veils for his eyes" (i.e., eyelids) to "pull them down" whenever he is faced with the possibility of looking at something prohibited; "a gate for his tongue" (i.e., lips), which he can close when at risk of saying something wrong or consuming a prohibited substance; and a cover for his private parts, which he is allowed to lift only in licit situations. Despite this assistance, the exegetes note, it did not take Adam more than the time between the noon and the

afternoon prayers to disobey God and consequently to be banished from the Garden (Ṭ10: 340–1).

As stated in this verse and fully acknowledged by our exegetes, Adam's or humankind's acceptance of the burden of the trust (*amāna*) was not a sign of good judgment. In fact, the three parties to which the same offer was made, the heavens, the earth, and the hills, or possibly all of creation with the exception of humans (as the words heavens and earth are sometimes understood as referring to their inhabitants), proved to be wiser in their decision. In spite of the fact that they were more powerful than the human being, our exegetes note, they still realized that this burden was too heavy for them, whereas the human being, despite his/her frailty, did not shrink from such a momentous task.

Commenting on this theme, Rahman writes,

It is this deep-seated moral fact that constitutes the eternal challenge for man and renders his life an unceasing moral struggle. In this struggle, God is with man, *provided man makes the necessary effort*. Man is squarely charged with this effort because he is unique in the order of creation, having been endowed with free choice in order to fulfill his mission as God's vicegerent. It is this mission – the attempt to create a moral social order on earth – which the Qur'an (33: 72) describes as the "Trust." God offered the Trust to the heavens and the earth but they refused to accept it, being frightened of the burden involved; it was accepted by man, whom the Qur'an tenderly rebukes as "unfair to himself and foolhardy." [*zalūm* and *jahūl*]²¹

Rahman, therefore, clearly perceives a link between humans' uniqueness and the theme of *amāna*, which, in his opinion, is connected to the idea of free will. Although it is not clear whether he intends this uniqueness in a different or a better sense, because the Qur'an states that before being assumed by humans the same trust was offered to other creatures, which willingly chose not to take it, we can see that whatever status emanates from this function, it was not coveted by other creatures. In fact, because the Qur'an interprets humans' assumption of the trust as a sign of extreme *zulm* and *jahl* (concepts discussed later), bearing this trust can hardly be considered a privilege. Rather, this decision seems to be indicative of the human being's initial lack of judiciousness and to have resulted in burdening him/her with a taxing challenge.

The Qur'an's description of the human acceptance of the trust as *zalūm* and *jahūl* is a far more severe criticism than a mere "tender rebuke," as Rahman tries to present it. In his discussion of the first of these concepts,

²¹ Rahman, *Major Themes*, 18 (emphasis in the original).

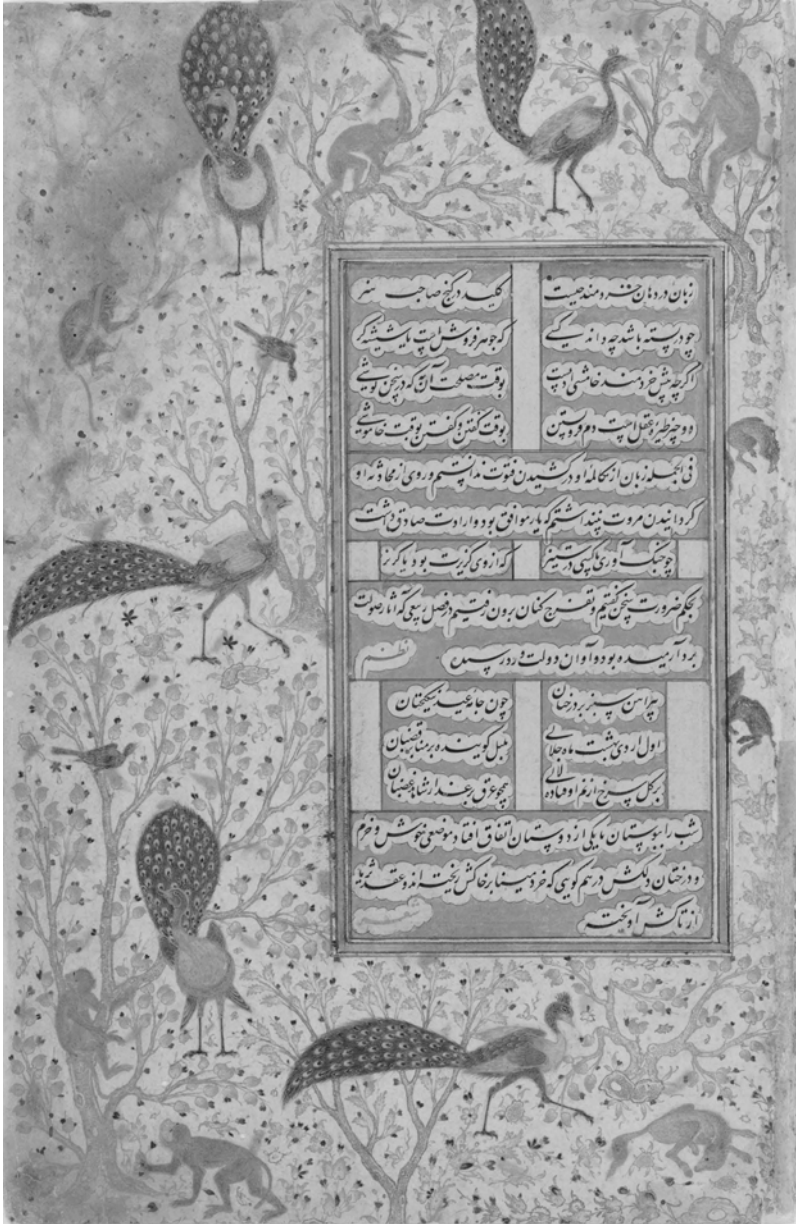


FIGURE 5. Folio from a Gulistan (Rosegarden) by Sa'di. Reproduced from Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.: Gift of the Art and History Trust in honor of Ezzat-Malek Soudavar, F1998.5.5. With permission.

zulm, Izutsu writes that it “is not too much to say that it is one of the most important negative value words in the Qur'an.”²² Izutsu also explains that the “primary meaning of *ZLM* is, in the opinion of many of the authoritative lexicographers, that of ‘putting in a wrong place.’”²³ The Qur'anic usage of the intensive form of the adjective derived from this root would indicate that the human being is not only the wrong place for (i.e., unfit to assume) the *amāna* but would seem to be utterly unqualified for this role.

The second characteristic, *jahūl*, is an even more serious criticism than the first. In his discussion of this concept, Izutsu says,

Jahl is the typical behavior pattern of a hot-blooded impetuous man, who tends to lose his self-control on the slightest provocation, and consequently to act recklessly, driven by an uncontrollable blind passion, without reflecting on the disastrous consequence this behavior might lead to. It is the behavior pattern peculiar to a man of an extremely touchy and passionate nature, who has no control of his own feelings and emotions, and who, therefore, easily surrenders himself to the dictates of violent passion, losing the sense of what is right and what is wrong.²⁴

The opposite of *jahl*, Izutsu further explains, is *hilm*, which is “the nature of a man who is able to stop the outburst of this very *jahl*.” “If *jahl* is a burning flame of anger,” he states, “*hilm* is calmness, balanced mind, self-control, and steadiness of judgment.”²⁵ *Jahl*, one of the characteristics of the pre-Islamic (*Jāhili*) Arabs, was “from the Islamic point of view ... a manifestation of human presumptuousness, insolence and arrogance caused by man's ignorance of himself and God.”²⁶ In this way, it is possible to view *jahl* as an attitude standing in opposition to *islām*, or surrender (to God). In view of this, by declining the *amāna*, not only did the parties to which this offer was made prove to be more balanced and steady of judgment – to use some of Izutsu's characterizations – than the human being, but perhaps even more Muslim (i.e., one who surrendered him/herself). One may even wonder whether the whole point of the revealed religion of Islam (i.e., surrender) is to teach human beings to submit themselves to God just like other fellow creatures do. This point, in fact, is explicitly made by Rahman who writes, “Since everything in the universe does behave in accordance with its ingrained laws ... the whole

²² Izutsu, *Ethico-religious Concepts in the Qur'an*, 164.

²³ *Ibid.*, 164–5. See also Rahman, *Major Themes*, 25.

²⁴ Toshihiko Izutsu, *God and Man in the Qur'an: Semantics of the Qur'anic Weltanschauung* (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust, 2002), 223–4.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 221.

universe is therefore Muslim, surrendering to the Will of God. Man is the only exception to this universal law.”²⁷ Such a view would indicate that the human race at large is perhaps at a disadvantage compared to other creatures rather than the other way round, for although the positive qualities of obedience and subjugation to God come naturally to these creatures, humans must strive to reach this state. From a Qur'anic perspective most humans fail even to take up this challenge and to strive toward this goal, and thus the majority of them remain non-Muslim.

The depiction of humans in the Qur'an

Zulm and *jahl* are not the only negative traits that characterize human nature from a Qur'anic perspective. In addition to these two attributes, the Qur'an describes the human being as *ḍā'if* (weak), *ya'ūs* (despairing), *kafūr* and *kaffār* (ingrate), *'ajūl* (hasty), *qatūr* (grudging), *manū'* (niggardly), *qanūt* (desperate), *halū'* (impatient and restless), *jazū'* (fretful), and *kanūd* (ungrateful). Notably, with the exception of the adjective *ḍā'if*, all of these adjectives occur in intensive forms, an indication of how deeply the Qur'an considers these characteristics to be entrenched in human nature.²⁸ In fact, as Neal Robinson observes, the Qur'an contains a number of “categorical denunciations of humankind (*al-insān*).”²⁹ For example, we read in sura 70/*al-Ma'ārij*, “Humankind has been created restless, when evil touches him, impatient, when good touches him, niggardly.” Likewise, the Qur'an says, “Humankind indeed acts insolently; he considers himself self-sufficient” (96/*al-ʿAlaq*: 6–7), and “Humankind is grudging towards his Lord and indeed he is a witness against that. Indeed he is passionate in his love of wealth” (100/*al-ʿĀdiyāt*: 6–8).³⁰

It is, in fact, quite remarkable that out of the sixty-five occurrences of the word *insān* (human being) in the Qur'an, only four can be regarded as neutral, neither praising nor denouncing certain potential traits of humans. Three of these consist of recommendations to treat parents well (29/*al-Ankabūt*: 8; 31/*Luqmān*: 14; 46/*al-Aḥqāf*: 15), and one simply states that God is the creator of human (55/*al-Raḥmān*: 3). The remaining instances either highlight humans' lowly origin, emphasize human

²⁷ Rahman, *Major Themes*, 23–4.

²⁸ The adjective *ḍā'if* does not have an intensive form.

²⁹ Neal Robinson, *Discovering the Qur'an: A Contemporary Approach to a Veiled Text*. (Washington, D. C.: Georgetown University Press, 2003, second edition), 117.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, Robinson's translation. For more on this point, see Robinson, 116–20.

flaws, or point to the paradoxical phenomenon of arrogant behavior coming from such a lowly creature. For example, 23/al-Mu'minūn: 12 traces humans' origin back to "a product of wet earth (*sulāla min fīn*)"; 15/al-Ḥijr: 26 asserts that "Verily We created man of potter's clay of black mud altered (*saḥṣāl min ḥama' masnūn*)"; and 32/al-Sajda: 8 reminds us that God "made his (the human being's) seed from a draught of despised fluid (*min mā' mahīn*)."³¹ The intention to highlight the humble origin of humans is clear not only in the fact that their creation is traced back to simple elements (water and dirt), but also in the adjectives modifying these elements. The water from which human seed is made is despised (*mahīn*), and the clay from which humans were originally shaped is black mud altered (*ḥama' masnūn*), which means not only "mud brought into shape," as a number of English translations indicate, but also "altered in composition," that is, fetid and smelly. From this emphasis on the lowly origins of humans, it seems justified to deduce that the Qur'an portrays them as having no intrinsic or innate superiority.

Ungratefulness, arrogance, and other types of flaws constitute the most recurring themes in the discussion of humans. The paradox of human constitution is also highlighted. In 80/Abas: 17–9 it is exclaimed, "Cursed be man! how ungrateful is he (*qutila al-insānu mā akfarah*)! Of what thing did He create him? Of a small seed; He created him." Likewise, 16/al-Nahl: 4 and 36/Yāsīn: 77 state that the human being was created from "a drop of fluid" (*nuṭfa*), yet he became "an open opponent" (*khaṣīm mubīn*).

Describing humans in such ways does not imply, however, that from a Qur'anic perspective the human being is inherently corrupt or immoral. In fact, as Rahman points out, in this respect "the Qur'an is not just descriptive but is primarily prescriptive." By highlighting these negative psychological drives this scripture seeks to heighten humans' awareness of their own potential weaknesses and potential flaws so that they transcend them. As Rahman explains,

Phrases like "God has sealed their hearts, blinded their eyes, deafened them to truth" in the Qur'ān do have a descriptive meaning ... but even more primarily in such contexts, to change the ways of men in the right direction. Thus, all our clarifications and interpretations of such usages in the Qur'ān – factual, and moral – operate jointly and must be properly understood and assigned proportionate roles.³¹

Therefore, in the same way that the Qur'an highlights human potential flaws, it also prescribes preventive, preemptive, and/or curative remedies

³¹ Rahman, *Major Themes*, 23.

for them and assures them of God's help and forgiveness. Human beings may be limited by different types of psychological drives; nonetheless, they have the potential and capability to avoid and rise above such limitations should they want and try to.

It is also remarkable that, in contrast to the word *insān*, which evokes mostly negative connotations, when humans are referred to as *'ibād* (sing. *'abd*: slave/subject of God; the root *'-b-d* denotes the idea of worshipping), a noticeably more positive image emerges. This is particularly the case when humans are referred to as My/Our subjects (*'ibādī/ibādunā*), *'ibād Allah* (subjects of God), or *'ibād al-Rahmān* (subjects of the most Beneficent). This image is particularly clear in 25/al-Furqān: 63–75, which states:

'Ibād al-Rahmān are they who walk upon the earth modestly, and when the foolish ones address them answer: Peace;

And who spend the night before their Lord, prostrate and standing,

And who say: Our Lord! Avert from us the doom of hell; The doom thereof is anguish;

It is wretched as abode and station;

And those who, when they spend, are neither prodigal nor grudging; and there is ever a firm station between the two;

And those who do not invoke with God another deity, nor take the life which God has forbidden save in (course of) justice, nor commit adultery – and whoso does this shall pay the penalty;

The doom will be doubled for him on the Day of Resurrection, and he will abide therein disdained for ever;

Save those who repent and believe and do righteous work; as for such, God will change their evil deeds to good deeds. God is ever Forgiving, Merciful.

And whosoever repents and does good, they verily repent toward God with true repentance –

And those who will not witness vanity, but when they pass near senseless play, pass by with dignity.

And those who, when they are reminded of the revelations of their Lord, fall not deaf and blind thereat.

And who say: Our Lord! Vouchsafe us comfort of our spouses and of our offspring, and make us patterns for (all) those who ward off (evil).

They will be awarded the high place inasmuch as they were steadfast, and they will meet therein with welcome and the ward of peace.

Unlike *insān*, *'ibād al-Rahmān* are God-conscious. These two ways of referring to the human being (*insān* versus *'abdf'ibād*) indicate that, in a neutral state, humans tend to be potentially governed by negative

psychological impulses and that in their capacity as *insān* that is not connected to God they are characterized by a number of negative attributes. It is only when they engage in a relationship with God, as His subjects who worship and are conscious of Him, that they start realizing their potential. In their capacity as *'ibād*, humans may still err and are thus still punishable, however, as long as they reenter in a relationship with God not only will they be accepted, the earlier passage reassures, but even their evil deeds will be turned into good deeds.

The Qur'anic assessment of the extent to which humans have realized their potential consists of "sad accounts of the human record."³² In a number of perhaps mostly descriptive statements, the Qur'an asserts that "most of humankind give not thanks" (2/al-Baqara: 243; 12/Yūṣuf: 38; 40/ Ghāfir: 61); that most of them "believe not" (11/Hūd: 17; 13/al-Ra'd: 1); and that "We have displayed for humankind in this Qur'an all kind of similitudes, but most of humankind refuse anything save disbelief" (17/ al-Isrā': 89). In light of this, we are justified to conclude that although humans are endowed with potential or the latent ability to become better beings, they neither start off as purely flawless (the Qur'an often highlights their humble origin: despised fluid, black mud altered, etc.) nor after undertaking their life journeys do they necessarily become utterly meritorious. In fact, the Qur'an clearly tells us that most humans fail to realize their potential.

Although our four exegetes do not elaborate much on these Qur'anic denunciations of humankind, and occasionally even try to limit these negative attributes to the disbelievers of Mecca or to other restricted groups, all of them acknowledge at least occasionally that ingratitude and disbelief characterize the vast majority of humans. In spite of this, however, they frequently present humans as superior to, or better than, other earthly animals, which, nonetheless, are often presented as innocent beings and as worshippers of God. This opinion, as we have seen, is based on a number of elements, mainly on the element of rationality. Such views lead us to our last issue in this chapter, that is, the Qur'anic criteria for assigning status.

Qur'anic criteria for assigning status

The idea of status can generally be inferred from a number of comparative concepts, such as the concept of excelling; being worthier or more

³² Ibid., 30.

meritorious; being considered superior or better; being favored; preferring, liking, or loving more; and having more of certain things. Although all these notions can convey superiority, some of them seem to impart only a trivial and transient type of status. In fact, in the Qur'an it is possible to distinguish between two types of status: conferred versus earned. Whereas both types may raise their subject to higher ranks, conferred status by itself (i.e., when unaccompanied with earned status) is of a rather fleeting nature.

When dealing with these types of status, it is also important to be aware that some of these concepts are characterized by a degree of ambiguity. The English verb "to favor" can illustrate this point. This verb may convey the ideas of both giving more and liking more. Although these two ideas may appear interconnected, in the sense that when someone likes another more, this feeling can be translated into giving more to that person, this is not necessarily the case.

Conferred status

As argued, *tafḍīl*, which is often considered a status-related concept, refers to God's bounties, and not to personal worth or merit. Such bounties may impart some degree of superiority in specific areas, however, *tafḍīl* per se does not make the favored party better nor more valuable than the one who is not favored, and the mere receipt of God's *faḍl* does not indicate that the receiver is preferred or favored by God. Furthermore, the *tafḍīl* of one party in a certain area is often counterbalanced by the *tafḍīl* of another in a different area. For example, in the human context a person can be superior to another in wealth, however, that same person can be inferior to the second in health, as indicated in al-Rāzī's anecdote. In the general animal context, humans may excel over other animals in numerous areas, such as their possession of creative and cumulative knowledge; however, many other animals surpass humans in other areas, such as physical strength or the various skills mastered by certain species.

In addition to the concept of *tafḍīl*, the Qur'an declares also that "Surely We created man of the best stature (*aḥsan taqwīm*)" (95/al-Ṭīn: 4), which Foltz considers as one of the proofs that "[w]ithin the hierarchy of Creation, the Qur'an depicts humans as occupying a special and privileged status."³³ The same opinion is encountered in some exegetes' discussion of this verse. For example, al-Qurṭubī cites the exegete Abū Bakr ibn al-ʿArabī, who considers that "God has not created any being which

³³ Foltz, *Animals in the Islamic Tradition*, 15.

is better (*aḥsan*) than the human being, for He gave him life, knowledge, power, hearing, sight, and wisdom, all of which are attributes of God, glory be to Him.”³⁴ Although in some opinions this verse is interpreted as implying humans' superiority to other creatures, in others it is understood simply as describing one of the different phases in human life. In some of the interpretations cited by al-Ṭabarī, the meaning of this verse is that “We created the human being and caused him to reach young age (*shabāb*), which is the age of (optimal) steadiness (*istiwā'*), robustness (*jalad*), and vigour (*quwwa*). This is the best (*aḥsan*), the most balanced (*a'dal*), and the most upright (*aqwam*) of all of life's stages” (Ṭ12: 636). Therefore, in this opinion the phrase *aḥsan taqwīm* simply refers to one among many stages in human life and does not aim at highlighting the status of humans vis-à-vis other creatures.

Whichever interpretation one opts for, it is clear that in both cases this verse refers to conferred status, because bestowing on humans the attributes that supposedly make them better than other creatures or cause them to reach the age of their best health and balance are both God's deeds. In fact, it is possible to understand this verse as simply referring to another type of God's *faḍl* or bounties toward humans. In either case, the status this verse imparts on humans is clearly affected by the subsequent verse, which declares that “Then we reduced him to the lowest of the low” (95/al-Tīn: 5), thus pointing to the transient nature of this type of status. In a number of opinions, the phrase *asfal sāfilīm* (the lowest of the low) refers to another stage of human life, which is old age, when a person “becomes senile, hearing-impaired, with poor eyesight, mentally and physically weak, and unable to perform good deeds” (R32: 12). In another set of opinions, however, the phrase “lowest of the low” refers to “hellfire, which often becomes the final abode of the human being” (Ṭ12: 638). This interpretation, in fact, seems more justifiable in the light of the following verse (95/al-Tīn: 6), which excludes “those who believe and do good works” from reaching “the lowest of the low.” Al-Ṭabarī, however, prefers the interpretations according to which this sura is understood as dealing with different phases of a human's life. Although he acknowledges that believers are not exempt from reaching old age and that they can become senile and weak, he also argues that they are excluded from the effect of old age in the sense that, even if at this age they can no longer perform good deeds, they continue to earn the same reward as if they

³⁴ Ibn al-ʿArabī, *Aḥkām al-Qur'an*, 4: 415.

were still young and performing such deeds because this used to be their practice when they enjoyed their full mental and physical health.

Earned status

The earned type of status in the Qur'an is designated primarily by the verb *aḥabb* (to love) both in the affirmative and the negative, when it has God as its agent. The Qur'an, in fact, is very clear about whom God loves and whom He does not. Among those He loves, one can cite, for example, the beneficent (*al-muḥsinīn*), the God fearing and pious (*al-muttaqīn*), those who cleanse and purify themselves (*al-mutaṭahhirīn*), those who repent (*al-tawwābīn*), the patient (*al-ṣābirīn*), and the just (*al-muqsiṭīn*). In contrast, He does not love aggressors (*al-mu'tadīn*), unbelievers (*al-kāfirīn*), evildoers (*al-ẓālimīn*), the workers of corruption (*al-mufsidīn*), the profligate (*al-musrifīn*), the arrogant (*al-mustakbirīn*), the treacherous ingrate (*kull khawwān kafūr*), and the prideful boaster (*kull mukhtāl fakhūr*). There is no ambiguity, then, that in the Qur'an God's love must be earned through faith and striving for the traits and characters that the Qur'an considers praiseworthy. Although all of these are attributes mentioned only in a human context, they are all clearly of an ethical and spiritual nature. As we have seen, morality and, even more importantly, spirituality do not characterize human beings only, but rather all creation. Therefore, although the Qur'an informs us about whom God loves and whom He does not only in a human context, a glance at the nature of its criteria indicates that God's love extends to all nonhuman (and non-jinni) creation, all of which is portrayed in the Qur'an as God-conscious and as obedient to their Creator. The clear emphasis on these creatures' glorification of (*tasbīḥ*), submission (*islām*), and prostration (*sujūd*) to their Creator clearly serves to highlight their merits and to indicate that God is pleased with them.

Status in the Qur'an is also conveyed by the two words *khayr* and *sharr* in comparative contexts; these two terms imply respectively goodness and badness. The term *khayr*, as noted earlier, occurs in the description of the Muslim *umma*, which is said to be "the best (*khayr*) community that has been raised up for humankind" (3/Āl 'Imrān: 110). The reason the latter attained this status is that they "enjoin right conduct and forbid indecency," and "believe in God" (3/Āl 'Imrān: 110). Therefore, unlike *faql*, to be better is something that must be earned through the combination of faith and good deeds. Likewise, the Qur'an states that "the worst of animals *in God's sight* are the ungrateful who will not believe" (8/al-Anfāl: 55), hence drawing attention first to the fact that this type of

assessment is God-centered, as it tells us whom God considers to be better or worse; and second, it reiterates the same idea that this type of status depends on faith and deeds.

The Qur'an also states that "the worst of animals (*sharr al-dawābb*) in God's sight are the deaf, the dumb, who have no sense (*alladhina lā ya'qilūn*)" (8/al-Anfāl: 22). This verse seems to corroborate the claim about the importance of reason in considerations of status because it states that those animals that do not "understand are the worst in God's sight. Significantly, however, the only animals that are intended in this verse belong to the human species. They are those "who say, we hear, and they hear not" (8/al-Anfāl: 21). These verses do not state that the intended disbelievers have no hearing whatsoever, but rather that they are those who fail to hear (and benefit from) what is worthwhile: that is, God's message and the Prophet's teachings. Similarly, disbelievers are not depicted as having no reason, but rather as not putting their reason to good use: They do not understand (*lā ya'qilūn*). In this case, even if one insists that humans are the only earthly species that possess rational faculties (a debatable point, as seen earlier), mere possession of such faculties is to no avail if these faculties are not put to proper use. Reason is a good gift that God has bestowed on humans. Like all types of God's earthly bounties, however, its value is transient unless it is put to good use, and through it, one is led to know about and to obey God. This conclusion is the same reached by al-Qurṭubī in his interpretation of 17/al-Isrā': 70, however, even though al-Qurṭubī accepts that the only proper use of reason is that it allows humans to know God, he still considers that reason elevates the status of the human race (rather than believers) above that of other earthly animals. This conclusion is inconsistent with the verse 8; al-Anfāl: 22. Al-Qurṭubī, however, seems to have reached this conclusion because when comparing humans to other animals, he idealizes his image of the former. This stance, of course, is not unique to this exegete. In fact, it is one of the most salient features of comparisons between humans and other species whether in an Islamic or other contexts. Actual nonhuman animals are rarely compared to actual human beings; rather, comparisons involve idealized images of the latter to distorted and uninformed images of the former.

Those who are ungrateful and who fail to believe are said to be the worst of animals in the sura 8 (al-Anfāl) and then the worst of all creation in sura 98 (al-Bayyina), which declares,

Those who [despite all evidence] are bent on denying the truth – [be they] from among the followers of earlier revelation or from among those who ascribe

divinity to aught beside God – will find themselves in the fire of hell, therein to abide: they are the worst of all creatures. [And,] verily, those who have attained to faith and do righteous deeds – it is they, they who are the best of all creatures. Their reward is with their Lord: Gardens of Eden underneath which rivers flow, wherein they dwell forever. God has pleasure in them and they have pleasure in Him. This is (in store) for those who fear their Lord (7–9).

Although in the opinions of our exegetes the word *bariyya*, translated here as “all creatures,” is sometimes not as inclusive as English translations usually render it, they focus on excluding angels only from it. Our exegetes suggest that the word *bariyya* is either derived from *bara'a* (i.e., to create), hence referring to all created beings, or that it is related to the noun *barā*, a synonym of *turāb* (dust), hence referring only to creatures made of dust; this allows them to keep angels out of this comparison. Al-Rāzī, however, who opts for the more inclusive interpretation, does not consider that these verses elevate the status of believing humans above that of angels because angels are among “those who have attained to faith and do righteous deeds” as well (R32: 49).

Unlike the concepts of *faḍl* and *tafḍīl*, in the context of which humans are sometimes denounced for their lack of thankfulness, the concepts of *khayr* and *sharr* are presented on the one hand as contingent on faith and deeds, and on the other, as ultimately translating to reward or punishment in the hereafter. Furthermore, the reward of those who “attained to faith and do righteous deeds” consists not only of dwelling eternally in heaven, but also of enjoying God's pleasure. Therefore, the correlation in earned, eternal, and truly meaningful status is between faith and deeds, God's love or lack thereof, and reward or punishment in the hereafter.

The idea that God's love or lack thereof translates in either reward or punishment is also clear in 5/al-Mā'ida: 18, stating, “The Jews and Christians say: We are sons of God and His loved ones. Say: Why then does He chastise you for your sins? Nay, you are but mortals of His creating. He forgives whom He will, and chastises whom He will.” The same can certainly be said about the human race: If humans are God's loved ones, why would He chastise them for their sins?

This conclusion is in fact the same as the one reached by Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' before resorting to the argument of the Prophet's intercession. After refuting most of the anthropocentric criteria to which humans in the treatise resorted to prove their superiority to nonhuman animals, humans finally took up the argument of eternal life, claiming that those who will continue to live eternally are ultimately superior to the ones who will not. However, other animals countered this claim arguing that eternal life can be a sign of superiority only for those who will dwell

in heaven. It is only by departing from the Qur'anic theme of the punishment of disbelievers and evildoers that Ikhwān al-Ṣafā' were able to affirm the superiority of all humans to all other animals. The Qur'an, in fact, tells us that on Judgment Day "the disbeliever will cry: 'Would that I were dust!'" (78/al-Naba': 40), which, our exegetes explain, is the ultimate destiny of nonhuman animals, which will be turned into dust after obtaining their reward or punishment.

A final question needs to be addressed. If nonhuman animals are spiritual and moral beings that are not inferior to humans, then why are they not given the opportunity to earn eternal life in heaven as humans are? This question is neither addressed by our exegetes nor directly answered in the Qur'an. However, as indicated earlier, a number of other exegetes seem to accept that at least some nonhuman earthly animals will dwell in heaven. In addition, Abū Ḥayyān al-Andalusī (d. 745/1344) suggests that the word *mustaqarr* can be a reference to heaven or hell, which will be the final abode of *every animal*, as indicated in his commentary on 11/Hūd: 6: "And there is not an animal in the earth but the sustenance thereof depends on God. He knows its habitation (*mustaqarr*) and its repository (*mustawda*). All is in a clear Record."

Abū Ḥayyān, therefore, seems to accept that all animals, human or nonhuman, will enter either heaven or hell, and possibly continue to live there forever.³⁵ Al-Rāzī relates that in the opinion of the Mu'tazilis, after compensating nonhuman animals for their suffering in this life, it is possible that God will allow some of them to reside in heaven (R31: 26). Al-Tha'labī cites an opinion according to which the dog of the Dwellers of the Cave (18/al-Kahf: 22) and 'Uzayr's ass (2/al-Baqara: 259) will dwell in heaven.³⁶ Sheep, as indicated in the tradition attributed to Abū Hurayra, are also said to be among the animals of heaven.³⁷

These opinions have no Qur'anic basis and only a few of them are based on Ḥadīth, which suggests that they may simply be motivated by love for (certain?) nonhuman animals and a desire to maintain their company in the hereafter. Nonetheless, one of the reasons such opinions could be indulged is that the Qur'an does not rule out the possibility that

³⁵ Abū Ḥayyān al-Andalusī, *al-Baḥr al-muḥīṭ* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1993), 5: 205.

³⁶ Al-Tha'labī, *al-Kashf wa-al-bayān* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabi, 2002), 2: 251. Other individual animals that are sometimes said to be granted eternal life in Heaven include the ram Abraham sacrificed instead of his son, the whale that swallowed the Prophet Jonah, and the crow that showed the son of Adam how to bury his brother.

³⁷ Anas ibn Mālik, *Al-Muwaṭṭa'*, (Cairo: Jam'iyyat al-Maknaz al-Islāmi, 2001), no. 1705.

nonhuman animals will live eternally. The Qur'an's lack of elaboration on this point may be explained, again, by the nature of its intended audience. This is why it contains only one brief and ambiguous allusion to the ultimate destiny of nonhuman animals (the fact that they will be turned into dust), the interpretation of which depends on Ḥadīth and the personal opinions of the exegetes.

Even if we accept this allusion as the final pronouncement on the destiny of nonhuman earthly species, however, this could be because of the correlation between reward and punishment on the one hand and *amāna* (trust) on the other. If we accept the interpretation that *amāna* was offered to the dwellers of the heavens and earth (*al-samāwāt wa-al-ard*), then nonhuman animals could have been among the creatures that turned down this offer out of fear of the risk involved in it. Furthermore, because nonhuman animals still have a type of accountability, would it be too farfetched to imagine that they may have chosen to accept a different, perhaps milder, type of trust (*amāna*)?

Obviously, this question may be unwarranted because the Qur'an itself desists from elaborating on it. However, silence about this question may simply imply that it is not fully relevant to this scripture's guidance message. Humans, of course, may still feel curious about other animals' final destiny, as they may feel about other issues pertaining to them. Desire to improve our understanding of other species does not seem to conflict with the Qur'anic text. In fact, the mere attribution of so much complexity to nonhuman animals can be a tacit invitation to improve our understanding of other species. However, if definitive answers are unattained or prove unobtainable, one should not substitute them with mere assumptions or speculations. The Qur'an's human audience is reminded that "You have been given of knowledge nothing except a little" (17/ al-Isrā': 85).

Conclusion

In this book I have attempted to provide a non-anthropocentric reading of the Qur'an. This reading is hardly an innovation. Many Muslims agree that the Qur'anic worldview is theocentric, an opinion that is fully accepted by the present author. The Qur'an, of course, is also anthropocentric in the sense that it is addressed to humans, its goal is to guide humans to follow God's path, and it is situated within the realm of what is known, imaginable, and thinkable by humans. This great interest in humans seems to have been one of the main reasons why the Qur'an is often considered anthropocentric; because it discusses humans more than any other creature, it appears as if it cherishes or values them more. However, careful analysis indicates that privileged status is contingent on moral and religious uprightness, not species membership. The Qur'an's primary message is to invite humans to believe in and obey God. Those who fail to be God-conscious and to live their lives in accordance with God's rules are not privileged. It is in this sense that this scripture is theocentric.

The Qur'an, perhaps more than other scriptures, also lends itself to an eco-centric reading, whereby the entire creation is cherished. It is notable in fact that the first sura of the Qur'an presents God as *Rabb al-'ālamīn*, a phrase that many exegetes understand as the "[sustaining] Lord of *all created beings*." By ascribing to nonhuman beings' features, which, by Qur'anic standards, are considered positive and praiseworthy (such as submission to and glorification of God), the Qur'an seems not only to present nonhuman creation in a positive light, but also to emphasize the notion of theocentrism: The entire creation worships God.

Because the idea that nonhuman animals are inferior to humans is prevalent among Muslims, as it is among the members of other world traditions, I started my argument by addressing this particular point. Many would argue that nonhuman animals' inferiority in Islam is primarily founded on a number of Qur'anic themes, such as the idea of their serviceability to humans, inferred from notions such as *tadhilil* and *taskhir*. I did not contest the fact that a limited number of nonhuman animals (possibly only one species: camels) are indeed made serviceable to humans in some immediate, concrete ways (the notion of *tadhilil*) and that all of them, along with the entire creation, are adapted to humans' needs in more subtle and unstipulated ways (the notion of *taskhir*). Nonetheless, I have argued (1) that while providing service to humans, nonhuman animals, like all other nonhuman creatures, are answerable to God, not to human beings. God does *not* delegate to humans any type of dominion over other animals; He only allows humans to derive a number of benefits from them. In fact, according to other Islamic texts, humans who exceed the limits in this respect become punishable. The Ḥadith and Islamic jurisprudence go into considerable details in emphasizing the *ḥurma* (inviolability) of animals, human or nonhuman, enumerating the rights domestic and many other animals have against humans, including their owners; detailing the role of the government in guaranteeing the welfare of nonhuman animals; and stressing the fact that at least certain violations of animal rights are punishable in this life. Thus, Muslims are not free to deal with other animals as they may wish. (2) I have proposed also that whereas the Qur'an discusses mostly the serviceability of other beings to humans, this does not exclude the possibility that all creatures, including human beings, are serviceable to one another. This opinion is mostly founded on some Qur'anic themes which show that certain parts/aspects of creation are put at the service of creatures other than humans (air is subjugated to birds, prairies and paths to bees, etc.) and on some extra-Qur'anic opinions brought up by our exegetes. The reason why the Qur'an highlights the serviceability of all creatures to humans in particular, I have proposed, is that it is "guidance for humankind." It is meant to highlight God's grace toward humans as a way of inviting them to show Him gratitude and obey Him.

I have argued also that the so-called vicegerency notion is more likely read into the Qur'an. Previous research, taking into consideration historical (Qadi and Steppat), grammatical (Paret and Qadi), and contextual (Paret) factors shows that the earliest known meaning of the word

khalīfa is only “successor” and “follower” (of a previous nation, party, or ruler); the idea of representation or acting on behalf of another party crept into this word at a post-revelation time. Thus, it is very unlikely that God appointed humans to represent Him on earth, particularly not among other animals. In fact, considering the insistence of the Qur’an to portray the human being (*al-insān*) as mostly disobedient and ingrate, the notion of vicegerency would create serious theological problems. How could God appoint a creature that He often portrays as *ẓalūm* and *jahūl* (extremely unjust and exceedingly hot blooded) to represent Him, the Just and Wise, among a creation that the Qur’an portrays as submitting and obedient to God?

Finally, in the same chapter I have offered alternative interpretations to the themes of cattle’s supposed misguidance and the metamorphosis of certain humans into apes and swine as a way of punishment. These interpretations, I am aware, may be perceived as apologetic. However, when one takes into consideration the general portrayal of nonhuman animals in the Qur’an, particularly the spiritual dimension to which the Qur’an ascribes them, I believe my interpretation becomes more justified. If spiritual guidance in the Qur’an corresponds to knowing about and obeying God, then probably the misguidance of cattle is of a mundane, rather than spiritual, nature. Similarly, normal (non-metamorphic) apes and swine are among the creatures that know about and worship God. By applying criteria that are derived from the Qur’an, they are superior to those who disobey God. In this view, al-Rāzī’s theory that the point of this transformation is to inflict an extreme type of imprisonment rather than to demote the culprits seems not only more reasonable (full metamorphosis cannot serve as a type of punishment because it does not involve suffering), but is also more consistent with the general portrayal of nonhuman animals as believers.

Then I move to the discussion of the portrayal of nonhuman animals in the Qur’an, highlighting first that this scripture emphasizes similarity rather than difference between humans and other species (6/al-An‘ām: 38), a point that can be further substantiated by the fact that the Qur’an does not have a word for “nonhuman animals.” The Qur’an, furthermore, emphasizes that each and every animal, no matter how small or large, and irrespective of its location, enjoys God’s attention and is fully provided for. Similarly, nonhuman animals’ deeds are fully recorded, as is the case with human beings. Contrary to prevalent perceptions, nonhuman animals are presented in the Qur’an as spiritual beings who, furthermore, seem to be moral, intelligent, and accountable. By ascribing them

these features, the Qur'an, in my opinion, not only considers nonhuman animals highly complex, but also seems to imply that they be held in high esteem.

These themes, of course, are still open to various interpretations, and we have seen how some exegetes, particularly al-Rāzī, continued to resist this portrayal of other animals. However, even al-Rāzī eventually had to admit that nonhuman animals, particularly those species he observed personally, have “great intelligence.” The development noticed in al-Rāzī’s views, which, I think, is owed in a major part to the Qur'an, illustrates how this scripture contributed to the shaping of Muslim’s attitude toward nonhuman animals: It prompted many Muslims to observe them closely and to form more informed opinions about them. The genre of *tafsir* allowed us to have a glimpse into the sense of awe that many Muslims experience vis-à-vis the animal world, however, awe vis-à-vis God’s creation, particularly the animal world, is reflected mostly in works of *adab*.

Because the portrayal of nonhuman animals in a positive light still does not give us a full idea about their status (status is considered in comparative terms), in the last chapter I turned to the portrayal and status of humans and to the discussion of assessment criteria derived from the Qur'an. The notion that the Qur'an is an anthropocentric document seems to be founded partly on the fact that this scripture focuses mainly on humans, who, after all, are by far the most discussed creature in this text. However, basing this opinion on quantitative considerations does not do justice to the Qur'anic worldview. One needs also to listen carefully to what the Qur'an says about humans. In fact, emphasis on the human species, as noted, may be explained primarily by the fact that the Qur'an is meant to be guidance for humankind; however, another reason, as suggested by Ikhwān al-Ṣafā’s nonhuman animal characters, could be that the Qur'an considers humans the most controversial species. The Qur'an, indeed, states, “And verily We have displayed for humankind in this Qur'an all manner of similitudes, but humans (*al-insān*) are more than anything *contentious*” (18/al-Kahf: 54, emphasis added). Interpreting the Qur'an’s interest in humans as an indication that it values them more conflicts drastically with the criticisms this scripture directs toward most humans.

The Qur'an is not an outright denunciation of the human being either. It does challenge humans’ self-perceptions and brings to light many of the features that it considers moral and spiritual flaws. This, however, is done for the sake of addressing them. The Qur'an, in fact, never tires of prescribing remedies to these various ills. The main answer starts with

faith in God and proceeds into serious engagement with His commands and prohibitions with renewed assurance of assistance and forgiveness. Thus, rather than being either a celebration or a denunciation of human nature, the Qur'an could more accurately be described as an invitation or guidance for humans to engage in a spiritual journey that would lead them to knowing more about God and to submitting willingly to Him. In doing so, humans will join a harmonious cosmic order of submission to the decrees of their Creator. The Qur'an asserts that to God "submits whosoever is in the heavens and the earth" (3/Āl-Imrān: 83) and that to God "makes prostration whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is in the earth of living creatures" (16/al-Naḥl: 49). Thus, by submitting themselves to God (*islām*), humans will simply join in what the rest of creation is doing.

By ascribing spirituality to nonhuman creation, one of the points the Qur'an possibly intends is to present this creation, including nonhuman animals, as models and sources of inspiration. In the spiritual journey to which they are invited, humans perhaps will do better learning from other creatures, including other animals, than feeling privileged or superior to them. In any case, we can see that the Qur'an insists that the many gifts in which humans traditionally take pride, such as financial status and rational faculties, will not necessarily elevate their status with God. In the long term, they will avail humans only if they are used properly, that is, in ways pleasing to God. Thus, in view of these interpretations, it is possible to conclude that Qur'anic nonhuman animals do not function as a backdrop against which humans' self-image can be enhanced or their status can be inflated, nor are they placed under humans' authority and dominion. Rather, they are presented as fellow creatures (peoples like you!) that are cherished and valued for their own sake and as believers in God. God has perfected their creation as He has perfected the creation of everything else, for the Qur'an asserts that God "made *everything* which He has created most good" (32/al-Sajda: 7). Last but not least, Qur'anic nonhuman animals are there for humans not only to learn *about* them, but also to learn *from* them many valuable lessons, not least of which, perhaps, obedience and submission to God (*islām*), the very message of the Qur'an.

Appendix One

List of Nonhuman Animal Species in the Qur'an

Animal species	Arabic name	Description	Alternative meaning	Occurrences	Sura: verse
1	Abābīl	Flying creatures, types of birds	Together, following one another (adj.)	1	105/al-Fīl: 3
2	Dharra	Smallest of ants, small red ants	Mores seen in a ray of the sun that enters through an aperture	6	4/al-Nisā': 40 10/Yūnus: 61 34/Saba': 3, 22 99/al-Zalzala: 7, 8
3	Naml Namlā Qirada	Ant (collective plural) Ant (singular) Ant (plural)		2 1 3	27/al-Naml: 18 27/al-Naml: 18 2/al-Baqara: 65 5/al-Mā'ida: 60 7/al-A'rāf: 166
4	Ḥimār	(singular)	Onager	2	2/al-Baqara: 259 62/al-Jumu'a: 5 74/al-Muddaththir: 50
5	Ḥumūr Ḥamīr	(plural) (plural)	Camels	2	16/al-Nahl: 8 31/Luqmān: 19
6	'Īr Naḥl 'Ādiyāt An'ām	(collective) (collective plural) Running camels Camels	Running horses Livestock	2 1 1 32	12/Yūsuf: 70; 94 16/al-Nahl: 68 100/al-'Ādiyāt: 1 3/Al 'Imrān: 14 4/al-Nisā': 119 5/al-Mā'ida: 1 6/al-An'ām: 136, 138 (3 times), 139, 142 7/al-A'rāf: 179

Animal species	Arabic name	Description	Alternative meaning	Occurrences	Sura: verse
	<i>Hām</i>	A camel liberated from riding and other uses as a result of having bred a number of offspring (pre-Islamic practice in honor of idols)		1	5/al-Mā'ida: 103
	<i>Ḥamūla</i>	A camel capable of carrying burdens		1	6/al-An'ām: 142
	<i>Him</i>	Camels crazed with thirst		1	56/al-Wāq'ā: 55
	<i>Ibil</i>	(collective plural)		2	6/al-An'ām: 144 88/al-Ghāshiyā: 17
	' <i>Īr</i>	(collective plural)	Caravan of camels, asses	2	12/Yūsuf: 70, 94
	' <i>Ishār</i>	Ten-month pregnant she-camels		1	81/al-Takwīr: 4
	<i>Jamal</i>	(masculine singular)	Thick rope	1	7/al-A'rāf: 40
	<i>Jimāla</i>	(masculine plural)	Thick ropes	1	77/al-Mursalat: 33
	<i>Nāqa</i>	She-camel		7	7/al-A'rāf: 73, 77 11/Hūd: 64 17/al-Isrā': 59 26/al-Shu'arā': 155 54/al-Qamar: 27 91/al-Shams: 13 59/al-Hashr: 6
	<i>Rikāb</i>	Riding camel		1	59/al-Hashr: 6
	<i>Sā'iba</i>	She-camel liberated from work or use as food (pre-Islamic practice in honor of idols)		1	5/al-Mā'ida: 103

	<i>Wašila</i>	She-camelliberated from use for food as a result of being born with a twin she-camel (pre-Islamic practice in honor of idols) (collective plural)	1	5/al-Mā'ida: 103
7	Cattle <i>Baqar</i>	(singular feminine)	3	2/al-Baqara: 70 6/al-An'ām: 144, 146 2/al-Baqara: 67, 68, 69, 71
	<i>Baqara</i>	(feminine plural)	2	12/Yūṣuf: 43, 46
	<i>Baqarāt</i>	Sacrificial cows	1	22/al-Ḥajj: 36 (duplicate)
	<i>Buḥn</i>	Calf	10	2/al-Baqara: 51, 54, 92, 93
	'Iḥl			4/al-Nisā': 153 7/al-A'rāf: 148, 152 11/Hūd: 69 20/Tāha: 88 51/al-Dhāriyāt: 26
8	Dog <i>Kalb</i>	(masculine singular)	5	7/al-A'rāf: 176 18/al-Kahf: 18, 22 (3 times)
9	Elephant <i>Fil</i>	(masculine singular)	1	105/al-Fil: 1
10	Fish <i>Ḥūt</i>	(singular)	4	18/al-Kahf: 61, 63 37/al-Šaffāt: 142 68/al-Qalam: 48
	<i>Ḥitān</i>	(plural)	1	7/al-A'rāf: 163
	<i>Nūn</i>	(singular)	2	21/al-Anbiyā': 87 68/al-Qalam: 1
		Inkwell, ink, the Arabic letter "nūn"		

(continued)

Animal species	Arabic name	Description	Alternative meaning	Occurrences	Sura: verse
11 Fly	<i>Dhubāb</i>	(collective plural)		2	22/Al-Ḥajj: 73 (twice)
12 Frog	<i>Ḍafāḍī</i>	(plural)		1	7/Al-A'rāf: 133
13 Gnat	<i>Bā'ūḍa</i>	(singular)		1	2/Al-Baqara: 26
14 Goat	<i>Mā'z</i>	(collective plural)		1	6/Al-An'ām: 143
15 Hoopoe	<i>Hud-hud</i>	(singular)		1	27/Al-Naml: 20
16 Horse	<i>'Ādiyāt</i>	Running horses	Running camels	1	100/al-'Ādiyāt: 1 (duplicate)
	<i>Khayl</i>	(collective plural)		5	3/Al-'Imrān: 14
					8/Al-Anfāl: 60
					16/Al-Nahl: 8
					17/Al-Isrā': 64
					59/Al-Ḥashr: 6
			Angels, death, stars	1	79/Al-Nāzi'āt: 4
	<i>Sābiqāt</i>	Running horses		1	38//Ṣād: 31
	<i>Al-ṣāfināt</i>	Light-footed horses			
	<i>al-riyād</i>				
17 Lice	<i>Qummal</i>	(collective plural)	Fleas, locusts at the larva stage, ticks	1	7/Al-A'rāf: 133
18 Lion	<i>Qaswara</i>	(singular)	Marksman (<i>rumāṭ</i>), hunters (<i>qunnās</i>), group of men (<i>jamā'at al-rijāl</i>), voices of men (<i>aṣwāt al-rijāl</i>)	1	74/Al-Muddaththir: 51
19 Locust	<i>Jarād</i>	(collective plural)		2	7/Al-A'rāf: 133 54/Al-Qamar: 7

20	Moth/ butterflies	<i>Fārāsh</i>	(collective plural)	1	101/al-Qārī'a: 4
21	Mule	<i>Bighāl</i>	(plural)	1	16/Al-Nahl: 8
22	Quail	<i>Salwā</i>	(collective)	3	2/al-Baqara: 57 7/al-A'raf: 160 20/Taha: 80
23	Raven	<i>Ghurāb</i>	(singular)	2	5/al-Mā'ida: 31 (twice)
24	Sheep	<i>Dān</i> <i>Dhibh</i>	(collective) Sacrificed (ram)	1	6/al-An'ām: 143
		<i>Nā'ja</i>	Ewe	1	37/al-Şaffāt: 107
		<i>Nī'āj</i>	(plural feminine)	3	38/Şād: 23 (twice), 24
25	Snake	<i>Ḥayya</i> <i>Thu' bān</i>	(singular feminine) (singular masculine)	1	38/Şād: 24
				1	20/Taha: 20
				2	7/al-A'raf: 107
26	Spider	' <i>Ankabūt</i>	(singular)	2	26/al-Shu'arā': 32 29/al-'Ankabūt: 41 (twice)
27	Swine	<i>Khinzīr</i>	(singular)	4	2/al-Baqara: 173 5/al-Mā'ida: 3
					6/al-An'ām: 145
28	Termite	<i>Khanāzīr</i>	(plural)	1	16/al-Nahl: 115
29	Wolf	<i>dabbat al-ard</i> <i>Dhib</i>	(singular feminine) (singular masculine)	1	5/al-Mā'ida: 60
				3	34/Saba: 14 12/Yūsuf: 13, 14, 17

Appendix Two

List of Animal Categories in the Qur'an

Animal category	Arabic name	Description	Alternative meaning	Occurrences	Sura: verse	
1	Animal	<i>Dābba</i>	Any self-propelled living beings, including humans, angels, and jinn	Equines, horses	14	2/al-Baqara: 164 6/al-An'ām: 38 11/Hūd: 6, 56 16/al-Nahl: 49, 61 24/al-Nūr: 45 27/al-Naml: 82 29/al-'Ankabūt: 60 31/Luqmān: 10 34/Saba': 14 (duplicate) 35/Fātir: 45 42/al-Shūrā: 29 45/al-Jāthiya: 4 8/al-Anfāl: 22, 55 22/al-Ḥajj: 18 35/Fātir: 28 5/al-Mā'ida: 3
2	Beast of prey	<i>Sabū'</i>	Any predatory animal that is not taught how to hunt.		1	
3	Birds	<i>Ṭayr</i>	(collective plural)		19	2/al-Baqara: 260 3/Al 'Imrān: 49 (twice) 5/al-Mā'ida: 110 (twice) 12/Yūsuf: 36, 41 16/al-Nahl: 79 21/al-Anbiyā': 79

(continued)

Animal category	Arabic name	Description	Alternative meaning	Occurrences	Sura: verse
					22/al-Ḥajj: 31 24/al-Nūr: 41 27/al-Naml: 16, 17, 20 34/Saba': 10 38/Ṣād: 19 56/al-Wāqī'a: 21 67/al-Mulk: 19 6/al-An'ām: 38 7/al-A'raf: 131 17/al-Isrā': 13 27/al-Naml: 47 36/ Yāsīn: 19 3/Al 'imrān: 14 4/al-Nisā': 119 5/al-Mā'ida: 1 6/al-An'ām: 136, 138 (3 times), 139, 142 7/al-A'raf: 179 10/Yūnus: 24 16/al-Nahl: 5, 66, 80 20/Taha: 54 22/al-Ḥajj: 28, 30, 34 23/al-Mūminūn: 21 25/al-Furqān: 44, 49 26/al-Shu'arā': 133
	<i>Tā'ir</i>	(singular masculine)	Omen	5	
4	<i>An'ām</i>	Camels, cattle, sheep, and goats	Camels (only)	32	

32/al-Sajda: 27						
35/Fāṭir: 28						
36/Yāsin: 71						
39/al-Zumar: 6						
40/Ghāfir: 79						
42/al-Shūrā: 11						
43/al-Zukhruf: 12						
47/Muḥammad: 12						
79/al-Nāzi'āt: 33						
80/Abas: 32						
5/al-Mā'ida: 95			1	Camels (only)		
5/al-Mā'ida: 1			3	Fetuses of these animals, animals the flesh of which is permissible according to Islamic dietary law		
22/al-Ḥājj: 28, 34						
5/al-Mā'ida: 4			1			
5/al-Mā'ida: 4			4			
6/al-An'ām: 146			2			
21/al-Anbiyā': 78			1			
81/al-Takwir: 5						
5	Hunting animals	<i>Jawāriḥ</i>		Camel, cattle, sheep, or goat		
6	Quarry	<i>Ṣayd/ṣayd al-barr</i>		Camels, cattle, sheep, and goats		
7	Small cattle	<i>Ghanam</i>				
8	Wild beasts	<i>Wuhūsh</i>				

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